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The sun was setting in a red and violet sky as Cyborea entered the cool shadows of the cedar grove. A light breeze moved the branches above her and she felt with delight the coolness against her young body. She moved quickly, gracefully, balancing her basket of linen, her feet silent on the floor of needles. The grove was almost too quiet, as her memory stirred her apprehension. Once or twice she stopped, listening in the silence, her eyes watchful, big, and dark, then, reassured, she went deeper into the grove toward its hidden spring and clear cold pool.

The black hair and fine arched nose of the girl showed the purity of her Hebrew lineage, although the delicate skin and lighter complexion made her look different from the other girls of Kerioth who worked in the fields under the sun. She was not afraid of shadows, and with the others she had always enjoyed the gaiety and freedom of every visit to the bazaar of Kerioth. But lately these trips to the bazaar had changed. There was always that Samaritan, the fierce red giant who worked on the Roman highroad. Once he had followed her, looking at her in a peculiar way; another time he had even spoken—something about her hair, that she was the prettiest of them all—although she hardly understood his words, and only her fright remained in her mind.

Cyborea lived alone with her mother. Her father was dead. There was no man to protect their house. Nor could any of the men of Kerioth do much to fend off these fierce Samaritans since the Romans protected them. The women had to keep their houses shut when their men went to the fields. All the women feared these savage fellows, who belonged to the despised race of the "Cuthites," as they called them, and who were not even allowed to enter the synagogue. For did they not worship the idolatrous amulets buried by Jacob under the Enchanter's Oak? They had no share in the Resurrection.

The girl stopped, this time to rest and take her basket from her head and set it on the moss beside the path. She pushed back the hair from her forehead, raising her face and breathing in the spicy smell of the cedars. A bird sang in a tree above her. The whole woods seemed alive with the last sounds of twilight. A squirrel hurried along the path ahead of her and ran scolding up a tree. A pair of wood pigeons flew up with a slapping of wings, alighting on a branch to coo to each other. She became aware of the steady hum of insects, of the last bees of the day and the first mosquitoes of the night, overtones in the harmony of sounds around her.

She took up her basket and went on. She sighed. All day she had been thinking of Simon, Simon of the tribe of Reuben, to whom she had been promised as a bride. And he too, she knew, was thinking of her, because she felt she could see his dark eyes looking at her and hear the very sound of his voice. But Simon was with the guerrillas of Judas the Galilean, fighting the Romans. She had been terrified, in Kerioth, when she had heard the news that Roman troops had driven back the men of Judas, that the resistance was broken, the battle in the mountains of Galilee lost. Everything had happened again as before in the time of Hezekiah, the forefather of Judas the Galilean. And now she could think of nothing but the words Simon had said before he went away: that he would not come back if they were defeated. Yet she knew Simon would not give up, for he was as courageous as his forefathers.

Cyborea had come now to the spring where the clear water gushed from between the rocks with a sound like little bells. To think of Simon made everything seem beautiful: the earth became a paradise with flowers and fruit, with pomegranates and fragrance of nard. Walking along the brooklet, humming, words came to her lips: "My beloved is the strongest, most handsome of men; his body is fine and hardy as the noblest horse, tall as the cedars of Lebanon that reach for the heavens."

She set her basket on a stone near the pool, lying dark and cool in the last rays of the sunset. For a moment she looked at the water, comforter of men in these arid regions as love is the comforter of the soul. Bending down, she began to wash her clothes.

Then something so horrible happened that never would she forget it. Suddenly, brutally, she was pulled backward, her head knocked against the stones, and she felt herself sinking, weak, as in a bottomless pit, a heavy weight crushing her breasts.

When she came slowly to herself and opened her eyes, Cyborea saw standing at some distance the gigantic figure of a man. He was not even looking at her. He took his short broadsword from the sand where he had thrust it. Cyborea saw that he was the Samaritan, the Cuthite, the devil of the cursed race. She recognized his coarse head and the look of scorn on the vulgar face that was framed by long red hair aflame with the orange light of the sunset. He turned to he and laughed.

“Goodbye,” he shouted in Samaritan.

Cyborea roused herself from a terrible lethargy. H seemed about to come back to her. She started up and fle like a deer. Without looking behind her, she ran throug the dark cedar grove, stumbling over stones and roots, unt she reached the house. Only when the heavy door fell shu behind her could she take a deep breath.

Her mother was not home. She listened, holding he breath, but she heard nothing outside. Peeping through th hole in the door she saw that the red devil had not followe her. Then she realized that her clothes were torn an stained, and blood was running down her face from a woun in her head. She felt dizzy with pain. Trembling, she too her clothes off, and washed as she prayed to the Almighty She bathed the wound on her head and put on clean ga ments, then, exhausted, fell on her couch and burst int tears.

She was startled by a knock on the door. Stifled with fea she dared not move. The knocking, louder, came again an somebody spoke, a Jewish voice she did not recognize.

“Who is there?” she asked.

“Arisio, the schoolmaster.”

“Oh, you. . . .” Her body relaxed.

“I found a basket and some clothes, and I thought. . . .”

“But I cannot open the door,” Cyborea cried.

“That's not necessary, Cyborea. If it belongs to you, I wi put it on the doorstep.”

“Yes, yes, Arisio. Thank you.”

“Cyborea.”

“Yes?”

“I came to ask you something.”

Cyborea's voice was calmer as she came to the door. "What can I do for you, Arisio?"

"Can you take in a wounded guerilla?"

"Mother will not be home for a few days, but of course I can. Who is it? Where is he?"

"Don't be too upset now, Cyborea. It is Simon of the tribe of Reuben."

"Simon?" she cried. "My Simon?"

She leaned against the closed door. Otherwise she would have fallen to the floor. "Yes, yes. . . . Let him come immediately. Oh, Arisio, is he badly wounded?"

"A deep wound in his shoulder and he has fever. He must be taken care of at once and his wounds cleaned thoroughly and quickly, otherwise. . . ."

"Bring him, Arisio. I will take care of him. I will prepare his bed. Go, Arisio, quickly."

"I brought some herbs to dress the wounds. I will put them in your basket with the linen. Open the door promptly when I come back and keep him out of sight. Don't forget that if the Romans discover him they will kill him and carry you off with them."

"Don't talk so much—bring him! I have no fear. It is dark. I'll wait for you at the door, Arisio."

"I'm going."

She heard him running off. As if by a miracle she had recovered from her prostration. Simon had come. This was the moment she had been longing for. But instead of feeling that happiness of which she had been thinking so often a great despair now seized her. Simon had come, but he had come too late.

Quickly she unbolted the door and took in the basket with the laundry gathered by Arisio. Even the piece she had been washing was there, nothing was missing. On the edge of the basket was blood. She put her hand to the bandage on her head. Simon will be frightened when he sees me like this, she thought. And Arisio, would he understand what had happened to her?

She took the basket to a dark corner in a side room, and put the linen and herbs on a clean earthen dish. She made a fire in the hearth and hung a piece of lamb to roast. From a closet she took a stone pitcher with the best wine in the house and set it on the table with a jar of cooled water. From a cupboard she took a round flat loaf, fresh and fragrant. Then she sat down to wait.

Simon was here at last. God had sent him to her, too late. However, since he had not come because of her, but only because he needed care, perhaps it was not too late after all. Her duty was to nurse a wounded soldier. That was her task; she should think of nothing else.

The moon had not yet risen when Cyborea heard steps outside. She ran to the door, opened it wide and holding up her small oil lamp she gazed at the face of Simon. Supported by Arisio, weak and blood-stained, he looked at her uncertainly. His sickly, yellow face was distorted with pain, his beard unkempt, his eyes feverish. Her eyes filled with tears, and she felt only one thing: the need to be alone with him.

"Go now, Arisio," she said. "Nobody must know you have been here."

Arisio helped Simon to the couch and left as Cyborea bolted the door.

"Come, my beloved," she said, tenderly kissing him on the cheek. "I am so happy you are here."

Carefully she took off his garments and attended the wound in his shoulder. "Are you in much pain?"

"No," the guerilla said in a weak voice, "I only feel the happiness of being near you. But you have a wound yourself, Cyborea. What happened?" he looked at the bandage on her head.

"Oh, that's nothing. In my hurry to find something in the dark I fell and knocked my head against the chest over there." She kissed his sallow, sunken cheeks. "You are like a palm tree bent by the storm, but not broken," she said cheerfully. She told him how happy he would be here now and how safe, because tomorrow, early in the morning, the Roman cohorts would march away, not to come back perhaps for many years. She told him of her sorrow and her longing for him, and that she had always prayed for him, how she had begged Arisio to do everything to get him back, because she had heard that the fight against the Romans was totally lost. She made him comfortable on the couch and told him that she had often heard his voice asking her to open the door. Now he was there, and she would take care of him till he was strong again. She saw Simon's feverish eyes looking at her, bright with happiness, and she knew that he never would have come back, wounded as he was, if it had not been to return to her.

The next morning when Cyborea was taking care of his wound, Simon said, "Now I'm only a miserable disabled man. You promised to become my wife, Cyborea, and while I was away I always longed for that day. But have I still the right to keep you to your promise?"

There was a note of despair in Simon's voice. He avoided looking at her and raised his uninjured arm and nervously passed his hand across his forehead. She took his hand in her own. "Later, perhaps," he said, "you may come to know another man who is strong and not like me with only one arm. Therefore you must be free, Cyborea."

She looked at him, astonished. Free? Who would take care of him, her beloved? If he recovered from his wounds, it was true that he would remain crippled. How could she leave him helpless and lonely? That was impossible. She would take care of him and work for him. A terrible thought crossed her mind: she had almost forgotten the red Samaritan and what had happened the day before. She had not the courage to tell Simon now, in his condition. Was it not better therefore that she accept his offer and take back her promise? Then Simon would never know and, in his weakness, he would not be further spent by longing for revenge. She hesitated.

Then Simon withdrew his hand from hers. He had felt her uncertainty, and he did not understand it. Although his face was forced into a smile, she saw the anxious expression of his eyes. She could not make him unhappy for perhaps the last days of his life. "Free? Why free, Simon? We belong together, forever."

He kissed her tenderly, and excitedly, his eyes burning with fever, he said, "Yes, we belong together. I will work in my vineyard and with my left arm I can very well drive the plough through our field. I could learn the law and still earn a living for us both, even if I have only one arm. And now that the Romans are gone, they will not bother us any more, Cyborea."

Cyborea nodded. "Be quiet now, Simon. I can work in the fields for the two of us. Happiness will be in our house, and you will soon be healthy and strong again, Simon, my beloved." She stroked his hot forehead. The gratitude in the eyes of the sick man was more than she could bear. "Sleep, now, sleep," she said softly.

But he was excited with fever and went on talking. "And when a son is born to us, Cyborea, he must be named Judas, like my commander, Judas the Galilean. His example must he follow to become a courageous fighter, stronger in body and mind than all in Kerioth."

Startled, Cyborea repeated softly, "Stronger than all in Kerioth." Again she saw before her the image of the red-haired giant, and she felt a pain in her heart, tears in her eyes. Would God answer her prayers? Looking at Simon who was resting quietly now, she said, "And his name will be Judas."

The child Judas that was born nine months later had red hair, and as he grew he was taller and stronger than all the children in Kerioth.

Arisio the schoolteacher had been in many far-off lands. He had a vast knowledge, not only of the law and the Holy Scriptures, but also of the human soul and the body. He was the only one in Kerioth who had never made remarks about the red hair and blue eyes of the little Judas. Yet he alone could have suspicions.

One morning Arisio met Cyborea with little Judas in her arms. He looked admiringly at the strong healthy child with the great blue eyes and stroked his red hair. Suddenly Cyborea asked, "What do you think of this child, Arisio?"

"That what you must think also. I believe this child has been given you by the Almighty for reasons known only to him." He took little Judas in his arms. The child responded by laughing with pleasure.

Cyborea listened to Arisio, her eyes fixed on him. But he was looking past her into the distance.

Giving the child back to her he said with great conviction, "Yes, given to you by the Almighty. And it was wise to give him the name of Judas. One day Judas of Kerioth may be known in the history of our people, the people of God, as the man who has accomplished what Judas the Galilean could not do." He saw the tenseness disappear from Cyborea's face. "Simon and you are happy together, the Lord's blessings are on your house. Be happy also with this child. Believe me, Arisio knows something about children. As a noble horse must have a good stable and a good master, so a child, in order to become a good and wise man, must have a good home and a careful upbringing. I promise you, Cyborea, I will take him under my wing when he is old enough."

Cyborea went home contented, but again and again the thought came back to her that perhaps Arisio knew her secret and that he was aware of what had happened a few hours before he had brought Simon to her.

Once she resolved to talk to Simon, but then again she hesitated. Simon had returned to Kerioth only for her, he had nearly died from his wounds, and she had nursed him back to life. His right shoulder and arm were helplessly lame. Should she make his life more difficult still? Once when she started to talk about it, he had showed her how well he could move his arm again, and she had looked on, saying how wonderfully he was coming along. It was such a small improvement, and Simon's happiness made her feel so overcome with pity that she decided to keep her secret a little longer. Sometime she would ask advice from Arisio, whom they called a wise man in Kerioth.

Many months passed. One sunny morning Cyborea, holding little Judas by the hand, was walking in the shadow of the large plane trees just outside the town when she again met Arisio. As usual he showed great interest in the child. Cyborea let go of Judas' hand and he immediately went to play with some other little boys.

"Arisio," she said, "I have something weighing very heavily on me."

He looked at the delicate face and saw that she was pale and worried.

"Tell it to me if it is wise, but keep silent if it is not," he said, smiling. "The word you speak can become your master, but the unspoken word remains your slave forever. But this does not apply to Arisio," he added candidly.

"Arisio, do you still remember that evening, when with Simon you brought happiness into my house?"

"Yes."

"Did you know, Arisio, that on that same evening a great calamity had happened to me?"

"I really believe you are mistaken, Cyborea. When the Lord God of Israel threatens us with lightning and thunder and punishes us and afterward sends golden sun and mild rains on our fields, so that they bear fruit abundantly, must we be angry with him because of the storm that passed by?"

"So you don't believe that the hand of the Almighty will remain heavy on us?"

"What strange thoughts pass in your head! God's blessing is on your house, Simon is safe and sound, and to have a child like Judas is a great privilege. He is of the tribe of Reuben. If he had been of the tribe of King David, he might even have become the Liberator. Let us await his development with confidence."

As he spoke Arisio observed Judas attentively. The little boys with whom he played were older than he, yet the strong red-haired boy had seized one by the wrists so that he was helpless.

"See, Cyborea, he is like a young lion among the lambs. Send him to my school later. I will let him play with the lambs, but one day I will teach him that he is a lion with claws that must be used when the time comes."

"Are you thinking again of an insurrection against the Romans and not of the dead and crippled and of all the calamities that will fall upon us?" There was an expression of despair on Cyborea's face.

Arisio said he had thought of this often. Sometimes he had even been called a coward because he had left the guerrillas of Judas the Galilean to go home before the decisive fighting was over. He had done this not merely to save his life, but to be of more use than he could be with his sword alone. He had seen that in spite of all this fighting, all these insurrections and sacrifices in life and blood, not one foot of ground had ever been liberated from the Roman plague. To whet the sword and use it was not enough. The mind, too, must be sharpened, he said, and the will strengthened before Israel could be liberated. It could not be done with force alone.

"Let the boy come to me and I will teach him. Have confidence in this child, Cyborea. Judas!" he called.

The little boy came running to him. Taking him up like a doll and holding him at arm's length Arisio said, "His hair is like a golden crown and his chin is like that of King David. Why shouldn't he participate in the liberation? And it is good that his name is Judas. He will be a brave man like his father and strong like Judas the Galilean."

Thus Arisio again removed the doubts from Cyborea's mind. Taking the small hand of her son she went home determined to keep the secret forever, although everyone could read it in the golden sheen of Judas' crown.

On a sabbath evening in Kerioth, just after the men had come home from the synagogue, a violent thunderstorm broke out with flashes of lightning and thunderclaps shaking the valleys and echoing from the near-by mountains. Squalls of rain lashed the closed blinds of Simon's house. Cyborea, fearful of the violence outside, peered through a crack in the blinds and saw the cedar trees changed to giants swaying their dark arms, creaking and groaning. Cattle crowded in an open shed lowed plaintively. Not until late in the evening did the tempest diminish. Even then Cyborea had a feeling of impending danger as if the evil spirits raging outside had not yet disappeared, as if they had come stealthily into the house.

Although the wind was still roaring, they could go to bed. Simon was tired from his long walk, for he had returned from the mountain that morning by a roundabout way, and he dropped off to sleep immediately. But Cyborea was restless, tormented by thoughts of that evening when she had been attacked. She had felt for some time that it was her duty to tell him about it. Simon was healthy though still partly crippled, the vineyard and the fields yielded good harvests, and the small herd on the mountain was growing larger. She knew that Simon loved her, and her whole being was turned to him like a plant to the sun. Yet there was always that darkness in her. Melancholy thoughts tormented her mind, and sometimes in the dead of night she heard whispering, mocking voices threatening her. Simon did not realize by what a dark secret she was separated from him. If she kept silent he probably would never discover it. He would be united with her in love and passion again and again, but for her there would be no contentment, no inner peace. In sudden fear she realized that no children had been born to them. Again she heard those voices threatening her and accusing her of having abandoned herself to the fierce Samaritan.

In that moment she decided she would talk to Simon, now. Cautiously she got out of bed. Simon slept on. On tiptoe she went to the flickering sabbath lamp and blew it out. A shiver went through her. She was now alone in the dark with the evil spirits. Quickly she went back to the bed, arranging her heavy hair with one hand, and lay down close to Simon who still slept peacefully. Then she called him softly. But he did not hear her. Touching his forehead she said in a steady voice, "Simon, wake up, wake up."

"What is it?" he asked. He saw immediately that the room was dark. "What happened? The sabbath lamp has gone out." He was startled.

"I did it, Simon," Cyborea stammered. "I'm so afraid. There were evil spirits all around the house, and because they talked I blew out the sabbath lamp."

Simon rubbed his head. "I did not notice any evil spirits. Let me light the lamp again," he said calmly.

"No, wait, Simon," she said. "I have to talk. I must tell you something that has been heavy on my heart for a long time."

Simon put his arm about her and drew her head on to his shoulder. "Speak, my darling, and tell me what is worrying you so."

"Simon," Cyborea's voice was like a frightened child's, "when a man goes home from the synagogue on the evening of the sabbath sometimes two angels accompany him, don't they?"

"It is as you say," Simon answered slowly. He heard the fear in her voice, but in the dark he could not see her face.

"One is a good angel and the other is evil?"

"So it is, Cyborea."

"And sometimes they talk to the man they accompany?"

"Yes, so it is written."

"Did they talk to you this evening, Simon?"

"No, Cyborea."

"I heard the voice of one of them, Simon, but I didn't know if it was the good or the evil angel. It frightened me terribly."

"Tell me his words."

"He said, 'The lamps are burning brightly and your tables are set in order and are well spread with clean food. But in your soul is disorder and confusion, and these will rule you. And the next sabbath will be for you like this one.' "

"And what did you hear next?" Simon was listening attentively.

"I heard nothing more."

"No amen was said?"

"No, Simon, I did not hear that."

"Then it is good. Everything is all right, Cyborea."

"Why? Why is it good when I am so afraid?"

"It must have been the evil angel who spoke to you. He wanted to bring confusion into your soul. But the good angel was opposed to it and did not say 'Amen.' Don't be afraid, Cyborea. The next sabbath your heart will not be in confusion. Tell me now, what is worrying you. Relieve yourself."

"Take my hand then, Simon. I have a story to tell you." She drew a deep breath. Simon pressed her small, trembling body against him. "Talk quietly now, Cyborea."

Then she spoke, almost in a whisper. "There was a young girl who was longing for her bridegroom, away at the wars. She prayed to the Almighty asking only that her bridegroom come back to her unharmed. But never did she think of the lives of all the other soldiers and of the happiness of their brides, their wives and children."

Simon felt her breath failing her. "That certainly was a great sin," he said, "and the Almighty knows what is going on deep in our hearts."

"She prayed so because she loved her bridegroom above all, Simon. That evening she went to the pool near the spring to wash her clothes. Nobody was near, and yet she had a fear, as if great danger was threatening her. When she was busy cleaning her garments and thinking of her bridegroom, she was suddenly thrown backward and her head fell on the stones."

"Cyborea," Simon cried out, "this cannot be true."

"It is as I say, Simon," Cyborea sobbed. "Let the light of the sabbath lamp shine on me and you will see that I speak the truth."

"Speak first. Tell me everything."

"She was unconscious and a man, a Samaritan, fell over her." Cyborea's voice broke. She felt Simon holding his breath, his heart throbbing violently. She went on, more quickly, "When she regained her senses she saw him, a giant standing in the sunset, red as if aflame with the fire of hell. In a panic she ran away. Nobody was home. She bolted the door, washed herself and prayed to the Lord God for help. That same evening a friend brought her bridegroom to her. He was wounded and she thought that he would die, but she nursed him and loved him above all else in life. She could not be happy, though, for there was a great disorder in her soul, and again and again she wanted to confess. But when she tried to find words, she brought the disorder of her soul on him, and he thought that she did not love him any longer, because he was weak and disabled. Her anguish grew with her love for him. And the evil spirits came into the house after a terrible thunderstorm, and she knew that they would hand her and him and also the child over to hell. That is why she blew out the sabbath lamp, Simon, as the Scriptures permit."

She was silent. Simon breathed with difficulty. Anxiously she waited, but he did not speak. Outside the wind roared in the cedars. She said desperately that she could not understand why, in a good marriage, something so terrible could happen.

Simon sighed. "Only the man, the bridegroom could know this, Cyborea," he said. "At the war he had forgotten the law, and in his frivolous moods he had committed many transgressions. That is why the Holy One punished him by not giving a son to him who would be his heir and propagate his race. But the Lord gave the child to her, his wife, because she had been chaste. She suffered for his transgressions. But now they would be happy together with this child that had been given to them against their will. It was good, Cyborea, that you blew out the sabbath lamp. The next sabbath will be a happy one, as this is ending in happiness. Get up, Cyborea. We'll take fire from the hearth and light the lamp before the face of the Almighty."

They rose and lit the lamp, which flared up with a clear light. Then they went to the cot of the little Judas who smiled at them in innocence in the glow of the light. This child had to be born to them as their child. In the full confidence of his simple faith Simon said, "The Almighty has entrusted us with this child. Surely he is destined to a lofty calling." Tenderly looking at his wife he said, "And our next sabbath day will be peaceful and happy, Cyborea, with the blessings of the Lord."

To Cyborea it seemed that she was hearing the voice of the good angel now saying, "Amen." Placing the hand of her husband on her heart she looked at her little son and smiled happily.

2

In the first days of autumn Judas was sent to the school of Arisio. He was a sturdy boy now, but quite different from the other boys, not only because his hair was an unusual color and he was much taller, but also because his reactions were slower, he was less turbulent and seemed to be more self-confident. Often when the others were wrangling over sweets or small coins, Judas put an abrupt end to their quarrels by forcefully pushing them apart.

Arisio followed attentively the development of the "lion whelp," as he used to call Judas. When the children were at play or, later, when they practised fencing with sticks, and when they had lessons on the unwritten law or the Holy Scriptures, Arisio often watched him.

Year after year the difference between Judas and his playmates became more apparent. The boys liked to tell each other all sorts of secrets about the laws of health, or what one had overheard his parents discussing, or certain kinds of remarks they had heard from people in the street, or what one of them had discovered about the animals. Judas, who was not yet interested in these things, did not join in such conversations. Arisio knew that trees which bloom tardily bear big and healthy fruit. The boys, however, who were aware of this tardiness, ridiculed Judas for it. They told him he was too stupid to understand what they were talking about. And when Judas got angry they ran away shouting, "Amorite, red-haired Amorite."

Irritated by his being stronger than they, and knowing that they got the worst of it in every game or fight with him, the boys planned to undermine his growing ascendancy by shaming him. One of them had heard that long ago people with red hair were put to death by Egyptians and Jews. Surely, red-haired people must be criminals. One day after a lesson on the history of the ancient Hebrews, when Arisio as usual said they could ask questions, the boy said, "Why was it considered a crime long ago to have red hair?"

Ignoring the boy's malicious intention, Arisio said, "It never has been considered a crime to have red hair."

"Then why were red-haired people put to death in Egypt?" the boy asked.

"With all their so-called learning," Arisio said, "the Egyptians were but a superstitious people. They thought that red-haired people were followers of Set-Typhon, an evil divinity who was supposed to have red hair."

"And our forefathers?" the boy insisted.

"There was a time, very long ago, when they thought that all people with red hair were of foreign blood," Arisio said impatiently.

The boy saw the angry look in Arisio's eyes. Yet, wanting to show himself courageous in front of the other boys he said, "And we, what must we think?"

"Blockhead!" Arisio shouted. "Haven't I taught you that our great King David who reigned gloriously over Israel was of pure Jewish blood? Yet he had red hair as it is written in the Torah." With a meaningful glance at the belt which, in severe cases, was used for punishment he said, "And don't any of you dare call anybody with red hair names, for I know how to punish you."

They all kept silent, looking fearfully at their master who usually was so good-natured. But after school, as Judas went home by himself, they followed him. One of them called out, "Amorite." Then all fell in shouting, "Amorite, red Amorite."

Judas stopped. "I don't need Arisio to protect me," he shouted, walking up to them and shaking his fist. "Come up if you dare." But nobody dared, and as they all ran away Judas shouted, "Cowards, you're all cowards." Then, without another look at them he walked proudly away. But he felt lonely and humiliated. The boys didn't want him. He didn't belong with them; and all because of his red hair.

Arisio was worried about the unfriendly attitude of the boys toward Judas. More than ever he kept an eye on them and paid more attention to Judas than before. It struck him that while the others were whispering or trifling with some toy in their pockets, Judas was listening with great attention. And when Arisio saw that he had a question on the tip of his tongue, he encouraged the boy to speak. Not only did the deeds of Samson and the adventures of Joseph hold his attention but the lessons on the unwritten law also seemed to furnish him with food for reflection. By carefully chosen answers Arisio tried to develop the boy's mind.

More and more his classmates could see that there was a closer tie between Arisio and Judas than between themselves and their teacher, the mighty guerrilla. Soon a malicious whispering started. But they did not dare speak otherwise than in whispers, for Arisio was strong and he did not tolerate any mocking of the laws of cleanliness and purity. As so many of them at an early age had already committed certain sins they feared nothing more than to be discovered by Arisio, the righteous.

When Judas was ten he was a strong boy with an eager mind, thirsting for adventures. That summer, when the school was closed for the hot months, his father allowed him to spend some time with his shepherds. They lived in the mountains rising in steep ridges behind the slope of Simon's terraced vineyard. High up, where the water came tumbling down from the rocks, were some fertile valleys not overgrown with shrubs or dwarf oaks or cedars. The grass was green there the whole year, saturated by the morning dew and the purling water of brooks, and there Simon's guerrilla friends, Jacob and Aram, kept his flock of sheep.

They had been hiding from the Romans, fleeing from place to place, when Simon heard of them. He had a safe place for them in the mountains, he told them, and they could take care of his sheep, which he himself could not do. They could protect the flock from panthers and lions, and drive it farther into the mountains when the toll gatherers or the Roman tax cohort came into the neighborhood of Kerioth. And so they had been living in one of the caves in the steep rock face. They had also made a shelter for the flock in a valley farther away, to which they drove the flock over the ridges. The shepherds and their flocks belonged to the wilderness. The loss of a single lamb was a source of self-reproach, and they spent most of their time discussing better means of protecting them.

To the people of Kerioth, Jacob, the elder of the two, always seemed a queer figure with his heavy garment of sheepskin and the wolfskin bag on his shoulder. His eyes, deep and pensive in the weather-beaten face, seemed constantly looking at something in the distance. His thick hair with sunburned tufts and the unkempt beard covering his breast gave him a strange appearance. Although he took the spearhead off his sheep-hook when he went to the town, and left his wolfhound behind, the children were still frightened when they saw him.

But Judas had never been afraid of the shepherd. He remembered when as a little boy he used to sit on Jacob's knee and pull his beard and Jacob would call him his little lamb. But Aram, the other shepherd, was Judas' great friend. Much younger than Jacob, tall and strong, he often laughed loudly and there was always a happy look in his eyes. He, too, had a black beard and unruly curls about his face, but nobody was afraid of him. The boys crowded around him when he came down from the mountains, usually with his big bow on his shoulder. For Aram was a great hunter, and even on his way to the town he wouldn't let slip the opportunity of shooting some game. The boys liked to hear him talking about the wolves and lions and jackals he had killed. When Judas was strong enough, Aram had promised, he would take him hunting. Sometimes Judas held out his hand and asked Aram to squeeze it to test his strength. But when Aram squeezed hard Judas cried out. He was not yet strong enough to hunt lions, Aram said.

Judas was not to go along the cliffs as the shepherds did, his father said. He was to take the easy trail, and they would be waiting for him near the spring behind the first ridge. Carrying on a stick a bundle his mother had given him for the shepherds, he ran up the mountain trail till he was out of breath. Then he walked more slowly looking right and left trying to discover some big animals. This time, surely, Aram would teach him to shoot with a big bow. As he reached the top of the ridge he saw the shepherds waiting for him in the shadow of a big cedar. Running down the slope he shouted, "Jacob, Aram, here I am."

Although Judas did not show any sign of being tired, Jacob told him to stretch out and rest. It was late already and before nightfall they should be at the cave. They ate some bread, goat cheese and fruit, and Aram brought cool water from the brook. Judas reflected happily that the shepherds were his real friends. Lazily stretched on the grass, he watched the sheep drink, plunging their muzzles in the clear water. The wolfhounds, their eyes fixed on the shepherds, stood ready wagging their tails, and as Jacob shouted to them to go they jumped forward, barking and nipping, driving the flock toward the trail.

Judas, thoroughly rested, jumped up, shouting loudly. Swinging his stick in the air, he drove up the stragglers and joined Jacob and Aram. They could not move fast with the sheep on the narrow trail over the ridges. Judas would stop now and then and look at the flocks of quail and partridges that flew up, frightened by the dogs.

Twilight was gathering as they reached the valley. Near an open cave shut off by a wall, the shepherds had built their *marrah,* a covered shelter for the sheep. They had cleared the land around it so that no wolf or panther could come near without being seen.

At the entrance of the cave Aram made a fire and put on it a pot of lentils and dried meat. He made a bed of sheepskins for Judas, who was resting, looking at the fire. It was dark now, and he was sleepy. Suddenly he saw Aram reach for his bow and arrow, and in the dark outside a pair of shining eyes disappeared immediately. Aram seized a piece of burning wood and threw it in the direction of the beast of prey. Then finally he dropped off to sleep.

As the days passed Judas shared in the hard life of the shepherds. He learned how to lend a hand when a lamb was born, to carry it past dangerous gorges, over streams and through the wilderness where it could not follow its mother. The shepherds concentrated on protecting the flock and seldom thought of the profits from selling the animals. They knew nothing about Rome, Herod, or Jerusalem. The Torah alone was their source of wisdom.

Sometimes it happened that a Roman cohort, a maniple, or even a legion marched past on the road below. Then, for security's sake, the shepherds drove farther into the mountains. The memories of their fierce life with the guerrillas became more and more hazy, and sometimes it seemed to them that it had only been a bad dream.

They often talked of a Liberator who would protect men as they themselves protected the lambs. The Liberator was the Messiah, they told Judas; many said he had been born already in Bethlehem, the town of King David. And it was said that the shepherds had been called by the angels to go to Bethlehem and honor him, the child. Kings from the East had come, mounted on white camels with golden bells on harnesses embroidered with silver. They had brought treasures to the little child.

In the evening when they were seated near the fire, and Jacob was telling the story of all the marvelous things that had happened, and all that yet would come to pass, it seemed to Judas that in the high flames he saw the glorious procession of kings and shepherds and white camels going in to the little child in the stable. Looking up into the night sky, where myriads of stars were twinkling, he wondered if he, too, would see an angel signalling him to go and admire the child. For he knew the shepherds always told the truth; his father had told him so.

When the fire was bright, Jacob would read the Torah and the commandments of God, the Prophets and the sins which men should not commit. Aram and Judas listened, silent. Sometimes in the distance a jackal barked. Otherwise, all was silent and peaceful.

One night Judas dreamed that a great shining angel with white wings bent over him and stroked him across the forehead and whispered something about the little child and the kings.

"I saw an angel in my dream," Judas said the next morning.

"He must have come to see if we had taken good care of the best lamb of Simon's flock," Jacob said.

Judas took great pleasure in his summers with the shepherds. For some years he found them always the same. Then one day there was a difference.

It was still early, and the last pink glow of dawn was tinging the soft blue sky, and the coolness of the night was still over the land. Aram stood some distance from the cave looking out across the meadow. His gaze was fixed upon the dwarf oaks and boxthorn at the other side. He was expecting Alfeus, his old foster-father. Aram looked less fierce than usual. His hair, usually falling in unkempt tufts about his bearded face, was now smoothed down. His mantle of wolfskin was replaced by a garment of white lambskin that covered him from shoulder to knee, and instead of his stick with the spearhead he was carrying a pilgrim's staff that he had made of the live branch of an oak.

Equipped in this way Aram was about to enter a new life. He was taking a trip to hear the word of the prophet who was preaching in the desert and baptizing in the River Jordan. Like so many, Aram had heard that the kingdom of heaven was near. The voice of the prophet had sounded far and wide. People everywhere had heard of this baptist, who was covered with a heavy raiment of camel's hair fastened with a cowhide girdle and whose food was only locusts and wild honey. All Judea and Jerusalem went out to him and after confessing their sins they were baptized.

This baptist was a strong man who spoke with severity, even to the mighty, for they too, the Pharisees and Sadducees and Levites, came in large numbers to see and hear him. It was well known that he had threatened the most mighty, calling them a generation of vipers. He had said that even then the ax was laid to the root of the trees, and that every tree which did not bear good fruit would be cut down and cast into the fire.

He spoke of him who was to come, who would be mightier than them all, and whose shoes he was not worthy to bear. Again and again this baptist said, "Repent, repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Alfeus had sent word to Aram to go with him to hear this man whose name was John. Everyone said that this John was certainly sent by God, although he himself had repeatedly said to the scribes that he was neither the Prophet Elias nor the Messiah they were expecting. All this was happening at Bethabara over the Jordan, where this John was baptizing now. Aram was going there with Alfeus, a good man who was coming up from the town over the long trail. As Aram was standing there he heard someone calling just behind him. And there was the old man with Judas at his side.

"May I go with you, Aram?" Judas asked, and looking at Jacob asked again, "May I?"

"What do you think, Aram?" Jacob said. "Would Simon allow him to go?"

"The baptist of the Jordan announces the kingdom of heaven, and no one can be hurt by going to him," Aram said.

Alfeus added, "He speaks like Isaiah, the prophet, telling us to prepare the way of the Lord and to make his path straight."

"I want to see him too," Judas pleaded. "Please. We will be back in two days."

"Go then together to this baptist," Jacob said, "but take good care of Judas, both of you. If you see that he is a sorcerer or a black devil, protect the youth, for devils have wings like eagles, and they destroy the soul as the stormwind breaks a wheat stalk."

"Have no fear, Jacob," Alfeus said. "I have known John's parents; Zechariah of the division of Abia and his wife Elisabeth of the daughters of Aaron. Both were blameless, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of God. Of their child John it was already known that he was destined to live in the desert and guide our steps in the ways of peace. Nobody has ever seen God, but many have heard of the angel standing near Zechariah at the altar."

"Go then in peace, the three of you," Jacob said, "and take care of the boy."

On that journey Judas heard of many marvelous things that Alfeus knew with great certainty. He said that Zechariah had gone into the temple to burn incense, for the lot had fallen to him according to the custom of the priest's office. It was then that he saw, standing near him, an angel who said to him that his child John would be great in the sight of the Lord, and that he would drink neither wine nor strong drink. Zechariah could hardly believe it till the angel said that he was Gabriel, who stood in the presence of God and had been sent to speak to him.

Aram, who had been walking on silently, said to Judas, "It is just as Alfeus has said."

"Will you too be baptized, Aram?" the boy asked.

"I do not know," the shepherd answered. During the war his sins had been great and many he thought. What could not happen to him if he confessed?

"And you, Alfeus?" Judas asked in youthful curiosity.

Alfeus, who had a mild friendly face, said that he was old and had to prepare himself for the life after death. "We must make the paths of the Lord straight, the old ones first," he said.

A long time they walked on in silence. For the first time in many years Aram did not think of the flock or speak of it. He seemed to have forgotten the barking of his dogs, the bleating of the sheep and the jingle of their bells.

Aram had chosen to go through the wilderness, which made the journey much shorter. They went through valleys where many flowers grew in the shelter of the rocks and where the air was fragrant with thyme and marjoram, over narrow ridges and through arid plains. In one of the valleys they suddenly heard the roar of a lion. Even this seemed to make little impression on Aram, the great hunter. But Judas was reassured only when the roar sounded far away. When they reached a road leading to Bethabara, they halted. Alfeus, being the oldest, broke bread, and Aram, who had gathered ripe fruit from the cactus plants on their way, cut off the thorns, and they ate their meal.

"When the kingdom has come, what will happen?" Judas asked Alfeus.

"Then the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might and knowledge of the Lord, shall rule," Alfeus said solemnly.

Judas thought a moment about this.

"And the wolf and the lamb and the calf and the young lion will lie together," Aram said.

"That is what Isaiah has prophesied," Alfeus explained, "that we might understand that no one shall hurt or destroy his neighbor in the holy mountain of the Lord."

Then they rose and walked on till they found a sheltered place to sleep, for they wanted to reach the River Jordan early in the morning.

From the top of a hill the following day Judas discovered the river glittering in the morning light between the dark green of cedar woods. The banks were rocky with sandy places here and there. The clear water was streaming over rocks and white round stones. Judas listened to the rippling sound, and happily watched limpid water running over the shallows, enjoying the coolness of the river after the arid region they had crossed. He ran to the water, drank eagerly, and bathed his face and hands.

"It must be at the other side of the river, just beyond the bend," Alfeus said.

Big stones lying in the river formed a kind of natural bridge, and while Alfeus stepped across cautiously from stone to stone, Judas followed leaping boldly. Then Aram came, silent, with a heavy step. Beyond the bend the river was much wider, more like a big quiet pond where a crowd was standing.

"I see him!" Judas cried. "Look, there in the water! He is baptizing someone!" He went ahead in a hurry, but then, hesitantly, he halted to walk near Aram as if he were seeking protection. The baptist was wearing his garment of camel's hair, he saw, with a leather girdle about it. His muscular tawny arms were bare, his long slender face was surrounded with curly hair and, above the bony cheeks, his black eyes, deep in their sockets, burned like fire. His voice sounded like a trumpet over the water, announcing that the kingdom was at hand.

Judas saw a fat man in rich clothes go into the water. The onlookers, curious, came nearer too. The fat man was being baptized. In spite of his fine clothes he was immersed completely. Some rabbis and scribes, a Samaritan and an Essene kept aloof, showing no desire to talk to the baptist.

Alfeus and Aram, with Judas between them, approached the water's edge as the fat man came out dripping. But John had turned away from him already. He was looking at Judas, who felt as if the gaze of these coal-black eyes went right through him. The baptist looked only at the strapping youth with the fiery red hair standing between Aram and Alfeus.

Then John said, "It is good that you have come. Approach, boy."

Judas hesitatingly looked at Aram.

"You may go," Aram said, nodding encouragement.

His eyes down, Judas went into the water. Wading slowly, John came to him, and it seemed to Judas that a flaming fire was approaching. John's eyes were fixed on him, and as Judas raised his head he saw that the flaming fire was in John's eyes.

Taking Judas by the hand, John waded back into the river till the water reached his waist. Putting both his hands on the head of the youth he spoke in a soft voice. "You shall follow him who comes after me, and who is greater and mightier than I. Walk the right path till he comes, the king of the new kingdom. And carry my words deep in your heart."

Judas felt the strong hands of the baptist seizing his shoulders, and he was suddenly immersed. When he raised his head out of the gray veil of the water, he saw the ardent eyes of the baptist in the golden light of the sun.

John brought him back to the water's edge as if he wanted to protect him from stumbling at the beginning of his road. He went to a palm shrub growing near the water and, choosing a branch with care, plucked it off. Looking the youth in the eyes he gave him the palm branch saying, "Carry this palm branch home, Judas. Carry it with joy and humility, and walk the straight path."

Then he touched him gently on the head and went, his mantle of camel's hair dripping, to a flat rock. Some moments John stood there, deep in thought. Then, raising his head, his ardent eyes looking at the crowd, his sinewy arms stretched to heaven, he spoke in a loud voice.

"You all, who are you? What do you see and understand? The ox knows his master, the ass his manger, but you see and understand nothing, you who are blind and deaf, who are limping through life. Your whole head is sick, your heart is faint, sick you are from the sole of the foot to your head. Were it merely wounds and bruises and putrifying sores, it could be mollified with ointments. But you are being destroyed to the center of your souls by your sins. You are like a desolate country, like a city burned with fire. No longer do you possess anything, for your silver has become dross, your wine is mixed with water. Many of your friends are thieves and murderers, many are merely seeking gifts and favors. Your city is no longer a city of righteousness, a faithful city. The time has come when Zion must be freed, cleansed, the dross purged away. This cannot be done merely by burnt offerings of rams bought with stolen goods. For God sees it all, and he will turn his hand upon you. You are like coarse tow; one spark, and you will be consumed by fire."

Judas, the palm branch in his hand, listened intently. He saw the bewilderment on the faces in the crowd, and he moved nearer to Aram, who put an arm about his shoulder.

Louder sounded the voice of the baptist. "You imagine yourselves to be strong like those ancient oaks, but sickness is in you and tomorrow you will be like trees with dead leaves. You think you are a garden in bloom, but your garden has no water, and the flowers will wither. Do you not feel the yoke and the burden of your sins? The stay on your shoulders? The staff of unrighteousness that drives you on? You are less than the ox and the ass, who know their master. You are like the wild beasts of prey, murderers are you.

"Oh, if your clothing were merely stained with blood, all the people would run from you. But your hearts are contaminated, and God draws back from you, not because you are more stupid than the ox and the ass, but because you are a generation of vipers. Truly I say to you, you are murderers, if not by your actions, then by your thoughts, and the day will come when the hosts of the Lord will smite you, and the unrighteous will justly be destroyed. In your weakness you think that it is the mantle of power that is weighing on your shoulders, but it is only the corpse of your neighbor. Do you then truly love the darkness alone and not the light? Or will your feet yet walk the ways of peace? Hear, I am the voice crying in the wilderness, 'Make the paths of the Lord straight.' The law was given by Moses, but he who comes after me shall bring the light. I bear witness of the Light which lights every man that comes into the world."

It seemed to Judas he saw the Light and the path leading to it.

The voice of the baptist was softer now. "The kingdom is at hand, the Light is shining in the darkness now. Are your faint hearts not sick enough? Are you not yet longing for the Light? I do not ask for your gold, nor for your meat or your clothing. I only ask you to cast off the burden of your sins, to spew out the poison of the viper, to lay down the knife and the stone with which you kill. I ask you to have mercy, that you may receive mercy. Repent, repent, and truly, I say to you that the angels of God will come down to you and lift off the burden that is heavier than the one your ox and your ass are carrying. Come to me, for I have been sent to you to baptize with water all who repent, so that you shall know the One who shall be revealed to Israel, and bring the kingdom."

John stepped down from the rock and went back to the water.

Aram went into the water toward him.

Judas saw that John spoke to Aram, and then immersed him, deep under the surface. After that John said to Aram, "Take care that the boy with his palm branch returns home safely." Then John turned to Alfeus, who was standing there to be baptized, and gently he immersed the old man in the water.

With curiosity Judas gazed at the happy faces of the two men. Many others came to be baptized, and even the disapproving looked on, astonished and in silence.

When Aram and Alfeus asked what the prophet had said to him, Judas answered that he did not like to talk about it. Silently he stood near them, holding the palm branch and looking on with his blue eyes, taking in all that happened. His clothes were still wet, and he felt as if they were new garments that would forever protect him.

While they were standing there, John turned again to Judas, and his voice was not accusing but kind when he said, "Do not forget my words, Judas. Carry the palm branch home carefully. Go in peace, the three of you. The kingdom of heaven is near."

After these words they went, blessed, as if they were already on their journey to the kingdom.

Late that night they were back with Jacob in the cave. Judas, very tired, fell asleep on the sheepskins with his hand on John's palm branch across his breast. In his dream he saw the angels who came to admire it, and they were looking at him as if they were certain that he was resolved to follow the straight path.

3

A Roman ship, her full white sails bulging in the breeze, was gliding on the blue waters of the Great Sea. The Lady Claudia Procula, the young wife of the new Procurator of Judea, stood near the bow. She was peering at the coast, now becoming visible behind the foaming surf that formed a white line between the green land and the deep blue sea. It was the first sunny spring weather after the rainy season, but it was still cool at sea, despite the cloudless sky.

The wind, playing with the light silk of Claudia's gracefully draped dalmatica, caressing her chestnut hair, carried her perfume to Danio, the secretary of the military commander of Judea, who was standing near her. He knew that perfume. It was one of those exquisite rose oils, perfectly becoming her personality. His friend Odanti, philosopher and proprietor of the scent shop in Alexandria, famous for its precious oils, powdered scents, and balsams, once had told him with a sigh that the days of pure rose oils were past. They had been the fragrance of paradise; they no longer belonged to the present evil-smelling world. The Greek, Arabic, Jewish, and even Roman ladies who visited his shop now chose perfumes of unclean origin. When the Lady Claudia Procula, accompanied only by the wife of the Prefect of Alexandria, had visited his famous arcaded hall, Odanti, who knew all the women of prominence of Alexandria, Judea, and Antioch, had observed her closely. "She is among the women of Rome what my choice rose oil of Gizah is among perfumes. She certainly is too good for the tough world of Judea," he had said to Danio.

From the moment Danio had met her some days before, he had watched her, unobserved. In her soft brown eyes was a great sensitiveness. At times he felt Lady Claudia Procula was too much given to thinking. The features of her delicate oval face with the fine, somewhat arched nose were harmonious, although a little too faded for her age, and her mouth was tired. The Procurator's wife was no stranger to suffering.

The whole coastal region was now in sight. "I can distinguish the houses and palaces. Caesarea looks very attractive," Claudia Procula said.

Danio was again touched by the warmth of her voice that gave away the generosity of her nature. "Caesarea is like an oasis of green and flowers. Beyond it are the wild mountains of Judea. There are only a few fertile regions with enough wine and wheat, milk and honey."

"Are the people here in Judea less discontented than in Alexandria, or have they as many complaints as the Jews there?"

Danio hesitated a moment before answering. "Here also the complaints are many, noble lady. A great part of the people are living in distress and suffering in body and soul, which they consider the chastisements of God. But at the same time they also blame the Roman rule for most of the burdens weighing them down." He had spoken in a confidential tone. There were rumors that the Lady Claudia Proccula was on her father's side an Illyrian aristocrat. Her people, too, had been conquered by the Romans, and Pontius

Pilate would have married her because she was young and beautiful and rich. For her, although her mother was a patrician Roman lady, it had not been possible to avoid this marriage.

At first sight Danio had recognized the Procurator as a tough, shrewd politician with the cold calculating mind of an ambitious Roman. No mitigating influence of his milder Samnitic ancestry was perceptible. To be sure, there were times when a gentle, rather weak expression would brighten his sallow face with too-long nose and the pale eyes. But then a hard sharp flash would darken his eyes when his gaze was fixed on somebody displeasing to him. Danio felt that this man would not be a peaceful ruler.

It was rumored that Pontius Pilate had been sent to Judea to bring the people, spoiled by the mild rule of Valerius, to reason. This probably signified, Danio reflected, that Pilate would squeeze the people like a lemon and crack like a nut all resistance to his authority. But these rumors might be exaggerated. Danio glanced amidships, where the Procurator and Marcus Rufus, the military commander of Judea, were standing near the mast engaged in an animated conversation. He thought with uneasiness that the good times of Valerius were now a thing of the past.

The commander, Marcus Rufus, had insisted on keeping Danio, his secretary, because he considered him indispensable. Danio was a Jew and knew his people thoroughly although he had a Greek mother. He had studied in Athens and knew Latin, Greek, Aramaic, and Hebrew, and he could write these languages artfully on papyrus scrolls and on the most costly parchment. At the Academy of Athens he had learned to express his thoughts clearly and with refined elegance. Therefore, not only were the solemn official documents entrusted to him, but also the secret correspondence and reports that had to be short and clear. His counterpart could not be found in Judea, Marcus Rufus had told the Procurator, and as matters stood now, no Jew of any significance would be willing to enter the Roman service. The liberalism of Valerius had made the people of Judea, the priests, the merchants, and the noblemen more stubborn and defiant than ever before, and all of them were suspicious of the new directions of the government.

Pacing amidships with the Procurator, Rufus remarked mockingly that before their subjugation by the Romans, the Jews had been conquered five times, and despite this they were still convinced they were the chosen people of their one and only God. They never thought of choosing a better deity as the Senate in Rome would do.

While Rufus was speaking, Pilate, lost in thought, was looking across the water toward his palace and the gardens around it. Suddenly he turned to Danio, who had joined them, and asked him in a casual way, "Now, secretary, tell me which, in your opinion, is the best way for a ruler of Judea to come to a good understanding with the people."

"That is simple," Danio said, falling in with Pilate's tone. "The Procurator should avoid encroaching upon the possessions, the gold, the temple and the freedom of the people."

"Freedom!" Pontius Pilate said, looking coldly at Danio, "freedom?"

Danio's Greek face took on a subtle smile, "To a citizen of Judea, freedom means being allowed to say and do what he wants, and being free to prevent others from doing harm to him, the Romans first of all."

The set face of Pilate broke into a smile. "I can see that you have been a long time in Athens, secretary. However, my predecessor Valerius gave other advice. He told me to abolish several taxes and replace them with heavier ones. I myself am in favor of strictly exerting my authority and of imposing tolerable taxes."

Danio nodded. What seemed tolerable in the Procurator's opinion would certainly be intolerable to the people. But being aware that Pilate expected him to give his opinion, he said that the difficulty lay with the Jewish leaders, who were continually using their influence in Rome to convince Caesar Tiberius that they were being led to the slaughter like innocent lambs. Therefore, even the most powerful governor should be on his guard.

A broad smile broke on Rufus' face. "Intrigue is to the Jewish people what grass is to a hungry cow," he said.

"Still, the commander must acknowledge," Danio said earnestly, "that the people are honest and oversensitive with respect to their religion. He who takes their gold taps their blood. But if their temple is not respected their souls are hurt." Danio spoke respectfully in pure Latin, and did not disguise his honest opinion of his people.

Pilate, however, felt intuitively that this half-Jew, despite his suppleness, did not have due esteem for the authority of Rome, neither for the greatness of the Empire nor for Caesar himself. One could use but never trust him.

The Lady Claudia Procula beckoned Danio to come back to her. She asked him some questions about the palace, where she was going to live.

He told her that the state rooms were great columned halls of white marble with floors of brightly colored mosaics; peaceful landscapes were painted on the walls. The furniture of costly woods was finely sculptured. On the walls of the Procurator's library, however, were painted monstrous dying lions and gladiators bleeding to death. There also were set up the images, abhorred by the Jews, of the three Caesars: Julius, Augustus, and Tiberius. The Procurator Valerius sometimes had these covered when prominent Jews were ushered in, because the images were considered idols by them.

"The images of our Caesars, who have even been raised to gods, are idols to them?" Claudia Procula asked, startled.

Danio, fearing that he had hurt her feelings, quickly told her of the luxuriant gardens with flowers brought from the East and roses, gladioli, iris, and many flowering shrubs that Lady Claudia Procula also had in her gardens at home. Trying to comfort her, he added that surely the noble lady would find Caesarea as agreeable as Jerusalem and Antioch.

Claudia Procula was silent. The ship was approaching the harbor and she was looking at the great breakers beating against the jetties, the foam splashing up to the high towers at the ends. She saw broad carriageways, broader than any highroad of the Empire, on top of the jetties, and Danio told her that in the arcades underneath, seamen from all parts of the world could find shelter. Amid the colorful crowd on the pier she made out the Roman guard of honor standing ready for the reception of the new Procurator.

The Procurator, accompanied by Marcus Rufus, had come forward and looked admiringly at the great harbor works, especially built by King Herod the Great for the Romans. Extremely useful as a strategic access, Pilate reflected.

"King Herod was considered a great builder," Danio said, seeing the Procurator's appreciation.

"By every Roman he is considered a great king," Pilate said sharply. "He never failed to exalt the glory of Rome and Caesar."

"Our secretary has no words of praise for the great King Herod of Judea," Marcus Rufus said mockingly.

"To the Jews he was too bloodthirsty," Danio said. "He had his wife and her mother killed, noblemen of his court and merchants on the highways, the children of Bethlehem, and also Hyrcanus with both his sons."

"I thought he merely got rid of Hyrcanus because he feared him as a rival for the throne," Pilate said.

"To the people of Judea that is no reason to kill, Procurator," Danio retorted.

A cold glitter came into Pilate's eyes. He would not forget these words.

The ship ploughed through the surf then, passing the towers on the jetties, glided with reefed sails into the calm waters of the harbor.

Danio saw the crowd ostentatiously leave the pier to show their contempt for the new Procurator.

"Will we not be welcomed by the authorities and the population?" Claudia Procula asked, astonished.

"I am sorry, noble lady, but apparently neither the priests nor the people had orders to do so."

Claudia Procula's face became sad. She was disappointed, and when the company went in litters to the palace, no friendly welcome sounded, and she saw only cold eyes looking at her and her husband. She felt hatred everywhere, and she decided to conquer it. How, she would consider later.

Claudia Procula sat musing as she watched the tiny sails on the blue waters beyond the harbor of Caesarea. It was now some months since Pontius and she had come to Judea. She had not forgotten the hostile attitude of the population on their arrival. It was a warning that no bright future was in store for them. Yet from the first day she fell under the spell of the country which she had imagined to be no more than a desert. She was not unhappy here, she reflected as she looked at the town below, where the palms were lazily waving above the white houses. Ramblers in crimson clusters and purple myrtle grew all the way up to the flat roofs, where the resting places were. In the courtyards the orange trees were in bloom and the scarlet pomegranates of which King Solomon had sung already.

The land inspired her with poetic thoughts, she reflected.

Yet sometimes only a cold reality stared her in the face and all this beauty was suddenly changed into drabness. The men and women seemed always restless, they had tense features and showed no great signs of a happy, harmonious life. Yet they believed they were God's chosen people and the Romans only heathenish idolaters by whom they feared to be contaminated.

Nevertheless she had no desire to go back to Rome and the endless battles with intriguers and flatterers at the court of Caesar Tiberius. There, everyday life was filled with countless trifles. One was forced to waste one's days with hairdressers, dressmakers, and jewelers, and no one had the time to meditate. Unlike her friends she had never sought to have the future unveiled by listening to fortunetellers, nor had she found peace in her visits to the temple of the goddess Venus. There were no gods in the holy of holies in the temple of the Jews. It was a mysterious place, empty, as Pompeius himself saw after the taking of Jerusalem. Yet the Jews were convinced that Pompeius' mysterious death, shortly after, was a punishment of their God for desecrating his sanctuary. True, the rabbis were a conceited clique, but sometimes she caught herself thinking of their single God who, unlike Caesar, was not a human being. They said he would send a heavenly messenger who would establish a messianic reign on earth. Pontius made fun of her preoccupation with these matters. Only yesterday he told her that she would be like her bosom friend Fulvia in Rome, who was converted to the Jewish belief and now gave great treasures to their temple instead of to Caesar.

Claudia sighed. Pontius was developing a growing dislike for the Jews, and she feared his task was bound to be hampered by great difficulties. Already he had told her that the Jews systematically repaid with ingratitude every benefit conferred upon them. His honest endeavors to establish a friendly collaboration met only with scorn and resistance. Her Pontius was a man of action, an honest man, Claudia reflected, and in most countries he would be appreciated. But in Judea? His every word, every good intention was misunderstood or maliciously distorted. However, in spite of all these difficulties she, as befitting a good Roman woman, would try to lighten her husband's burdens.

4

Judas had left Arisio's school and was now working in his father's vineyards and fields. He also helped him manage the money and the business of selling the sheep and cattle. In this way Judas was more and more taking his father's tasks on his own shoulders.

Autumn had set in, the autumn of a blessed year. The full golden ears of wheat had yielded large grains and never had there been so many sheaves put up in the fields. The fruit on trees and shrubs was abundant, the flaming red and yellow vines heavy with gold and purple grapes, the silver branches of the olive trees bending under the weight of the green fruit. Ripened by a hot summer sun and soft rains, the red and swollen pomegranates, symbols of fecundity, burst open showing their generous seed embedded in luscious crimson pulp. The fig trees, overloaded, bore a third crop.

The chazan of the synagogue had remarked to Simon that never since Kerioth had been founded had there been so much wine and olive oil and firstlings of cattle. Kerioth, so poor before, was now a land of milk and honey. The hand of the Romans was heavy indeed on the people of Judea, but God had given with generosity. Everywhere was abundance and prosperity, and as the time of gathering the grapes had come, all, old and young, were full of the joy of life.

Every year the gathering of the grapes was a great feast for the young people of Kerioth. Then many ways, at other times impossible, could be found to make love to the girls. Soon after sunrise the girls singing gaily went in a long cortege through the town to the vineyards. The young men joined them, each choosing his favorite girl and falling in loudly with the song.

As Judas on the mountain slope looked down at the gay procession, with flutist in front, coming up from the town, he was uncertain. This was the first time that he, and not his father, was host to the gatherers. It was the custom to sing a harvest song before picking the grapes, and last year Simon had chosen the song of the amorous vintager and his love for the wine and the girls. Judas suspected that his father had chosen this song because old rabbi Emmanuel was not present. All had sung it while Simon played the role of the vintager kissing the girls. There had been much laughter, for the girls liked Simon, who in reality was not as frivolous as he seemed.

This time Judas was standing there, uncertain about his choice of the harvest song. But as the joyful procession reached the entrance of the vineyard he was glad at heart. His welcome was cordial and he chose a song of thanksgiving for the prosperous year. As his strong voice intoned the solemn song, they all sang with him, and when it was over Judas said, "This time nobody will be rapped on the knuckles for eating the grapes."

Two piles of yellow baskets stood ready. Each singer took a small basket for the select bunches to be put aside for special wine in honor of the twelve tribes of Israel, and a larger basket for the rest. Chatting, they set to work.

The heat was still bearable, although the morning mist had already disappeared. Here and there a single dewdrop still trembled on the grapes, and the bright light of the clear autumn day glittered on the walls of yellow rocks that protected the vineyard against cold winds.

Although Judas spoke some friendly words to each one, as his father had reminded him to do, he lacked the easy manner that made old Simon loved by all. The young people of Kerioth all knew each other well but Judas seldom had much to do with them. When he was not working he usually went into the mountains with the shepherds, who had taught him to hunt wolves and panthers. Now, amidst all these girls and their lightheartedness, he felt isolated. He could not find words to bridge the distance in a carefree way. He could not, like Simon, embrace the girls, demanding a toll in kisses, and then wink at the young men. His father, too, did not have to take part in picking the grapes because his arm was crippled. He could make jokes. But Judas was expected to work with them.

The girls started picking where it was easiest to reach, and the young men took the grapes from high up in the fig trees and from under the latticework to which the tendrils were attached. Judas worked constantly and took no part in the gay talk of the girls or the bragging of the young men. Now and then his gaze wandered to the mountains, the autumn-brown meadows in the valley and the far, clear landscape. Then he quickly started to work again, but he had the oppressive feeling that the talking was less carefree, the laughter suddenly subdued, when he came near.

Sometimes the girls giggled and whispered to each other something about his shyness. The other young men tried to work themselves through the vines so that they could caress the girls in a casual way. But the girls seemed more interested in Judas because of his very aloofness. The fiery red color of his hair made a strange sheen about his face that never became bronzed by the sun. And the impassivity in his clear blue eyes was incomprehensible to them. Judas was not in the line of their admirers, nor was he among those who mocked.

Some of the young men tried to make advances by telling jokes. One of them said that Ruth, the daughter of the saddle-maker, who was conspicuous for the fulness of her figure, had the softness of a pillow. The giggling became louder, the words more and more equivocal. Even before anybody had drunk of last year's wine, set ready for the gatherers, a mood of frivolity had come over them. As somebody started the song of the amorous vintager, and they all joined in with merriment, Judas felt as if the mockery was directed at him personally.

When the sun was at its brightest, they sat down in groups in the shade of the fig trees to eat and drink. When Judas said that enough grapes were gathered now to begin with the pressing, they cheered. Extra garments were taken off and put on branches or stones, and Judas asked that everybody clean their feet in the large water-basin.

"Judas is not a good leader of the feast," one young man shouted.

"He doesn't understand what is due to us," Rahab cried. "Must we wash our own feet?" She looked helplessly around and glanced an invitation at Judas. But he ignored her.

One young man cried, "Let me say it, then. Young men of Kerioth, go and wash the shapely feet of our lovely girls."

They all laughed. Rahab sat on the edge of the basin filled with clear water, and again she looked at Judas. But he did not look at her, and another young man went down on his knees and took off her sandals. Holding her small feet he admired them with droll words, and taking water in the hollow of his hands he caressed her feet and ankles. Over the features of Rahab came a sensual expression, her dark eyes seeking Judas, who was spreading a strip of clean linen from the basin to the winepress. Some of the young men and girls were still splashing in the water, although the girls were shying away from being caressed like this.

The winepress was a huge basin hewn in a great block of stone. From the press the grape juice was channeled to small basins hewn in the rock, where it aged. This was the great secret of the exquisite aroma of the wine of Simon the Zealot, as he was called now in Kerioth.

Judas himself would not take part in the pressing, but when he had made sure that everything was ready for the first two couples, he made a sign to the flutist to play.

It was a dreamy melody, like the clear song of a bird. Slender Rahab and the quiet plump Rachel came laughing together to the front with two young men. Something fanciful could always be expected of Rahab. She had chosen as her partner the bold Gaulo, a nickname that had been given him because he believed himself as bold as the courageous Judas the Gaulonite.

The white feet sank deep in the purple grapes as the two couples stepped into the basin. In calm rhythm the flute sang, and keeping time the couples danced on the grapes, their legs red from the juice that splashed about on all sides. The melody became more agitated, the movement faster, the flute rose high and clear, over the dull sound of the stamping feet and the shouts.

Rahab's dark eyes were focused on the manly, reckless face of Gaulo. Ever more wildly she danced in the grapes turning now to a crimson pulp. Her legs were bespattered with the blood-red juice and her face was rigid as a mask, fixed in a voluptuous expression. Suddenly, with a loud laugh that sounded like a harsh screeching in Judas' ears, she bent down, took a handful of the crimson pulp and threw it in Gaulo's face. Surprised, he stood motionless. Then he burst out laughing and, with the back of his hand, wiped the juice from his eyes, still half blinded, and stamped on heavily, manfully.

That was Rahab no longer, Judas thought. She looked more like a heathenish bacchante, her head tilted backwards, her red mouth half opened showing her white teeth, and her eyes nearly closed as in an ecstasy. The wild movements of her arms and legs, of her whole slender body were the expressions of unbridled passion, overpowering in their suggestiveness. Judas, who always wanted to live a clean life, felt her lust taking hold of him against his will, penetrating him, taking away his breath, his self-confidence, pulling him down from the lofty state he fancied himself to be in. In his resistance against this strange feeling and in his fear of being carried away entirely by it, he closed his eyes to shut it out. And in this acknowledgment of his weakness a fierce feeling of resentment, almost of hatred, took hold of him. This Rahab, without loveliness or goodness or love for anybody, had shattered with her wild lusts all their simple, pure joy. In her were forces that conjured up terrible evils. He must destroy them. As this became clear to him, he knew she could no longer harm him, not even if she were possessed by all the devils. In the calmness of his regained inner strength he raised his head and looked at her with disdain.

Faster and faster the flute spurred the dancers on, while the others clapped their hands and shouted excitedly.

"Well done, Rahab, good! More blood of grapes! Give him more!"

Faster the hands clapped and always the flute played on in silvery tones, enticing, like the high voice of a distant siren or like that of a bird calling to its mate in a dark wood.

"Take her, Gaulo! Plunge her in the red juice and tame her!"

Judas raised his hand in warning. He looked at Rahab's partner. On Gaulo's sharp eagle face, now distorted by desire, the juice stained red as blood. A cruel conqueror, Judas thought.

Rahab playfully licked the juice from her hands and spattered more in Gaulo's face.

"More, Rahab, more!"

But Rahab no longer hear anything. She was staring at Gaulo's black eyes, glittered in his besmeared face. All were shouting now at the same time. That Gaulo was as dangerous as a devil, one girl said; he had power over Rahab.

Many devils have power over Rahab, Judas thought. He must end this—now. Going to the press he looked into it, and although the juice was not yet all pressed, he gave the sign to Aram's son to open the vent. Then he commanded the first couples to come out. The dancers went on for a moment, but the flutist stopped his music.

Rahab seemed to come to her senses again. The others stopped shouting. Nobody spoke as Gaulo, seizing Rahab about the waist, raised her up with playful ease and sat her on the edge of the basin. Then, jumping from the rock, he pulled her down in his arms and carried her away to a distant corner of the vineyard.

Judas knew that he should call them back and force them to stay with the others, but in his uncertainty he hesitated. They disappeared. They are like the animals in the field, he thought bitterly. And full of contempt, he shrugged his shoulders as if he wanted to shake off something.

Rachel stepped out of the press quietly, without the help of her partner. While she cleaned her feet and legs in the water basin she observed Judas closely.

"Why did you let them go, Judas, when you so often strike such moral attitudes?" she asked, quietly. "To be wise, it is not enough to read in the Torah alone and not in the book of life."

Judas blushed and looked at her dejectedly. "Perhaps you are right, Rachel." Without another word he turned away to give his full attention to filling the press again with grapes and to the following pairs of dancers. But there was no more real rejoicing. After what had happened to Rahab, it was as if the girls were afraid to dance so carefreely on the grapes.

Some hours later the procession went down from the mountain, singing. Judas stayed behind to look after the cleaning of the press.

The light of the setting sun fell over the landscape. In a few minutes dusk would cover the valley and the slopes of the mountains. There was a light haze in the air, about the trees and vines, shrouding the whole vineyard in mystery; the hard colors and contours began to fade away.

But the more silent it was in the garden the more noisy and crowded it became in the town below. On the square around the public well the people were gathering. At first the songs sounded clearly through the peaceful evening, but now they were more shrill.

As Judas looked down over the wall he saw that the torches had been lighted and the dancing had begun. A wild clamor was splitting the air, profaning all the tenderness in the quiet beauty and peace of the mountains. Judas saw that the old men, too, were taking part in the dancing. He thought of his father, always so full of jokes, liked everywhere, a man who enjoyed life, and yet was a good man. The wine cruets were handed around now. His father did not consider expenses this year. The Almighty gave the wine; his father poured it generously and gladly in thanksgiving.

As Judas watched the dancers in the light of the torches, the youngest child of Aram pulled at his sleeve reminding him that it was time to go.

"Do you hear?" said the little boy. "That is my father, now, playing the flute."

"It sounds beautiful," Judas said.

"He can play for hours, my father," the boy said, his little legs taking quick steps to keep pace with Judas. "When he stays with the flock in the mountains, he plays the whole night through so as not to fall asleep. My father always knows when some beast of prey comes near."

"Who warns him?" Judas asked, smiling.

"The angels. My father can always see them," said the boy.

"Does he?" Judas asked. "And do you see them too?"

"Oh no. But later, when I am a shepherd, they will come to me too if I am good."

"And do they come to the feast now, there below?"

"When my father is playing the flute there, he can certainly see them," the boy said confidently.

Smiling, Judas put his arm on the shoulder of the little boy. In the mood he was in now it was good to remember the happy evenings when he himself had lain awake on his sheepskins waiting to see the angels.

As they came down to the square Judas saw the shepherd in the light of the torches, his weather-beaten face framed by the rough beard. As he played his flute he was looking at something beyond the wildly dancing couples, the wine-drinking jesters and noisy young people.

Judas felt himself pulled by the arm. It was Rahab. "You'd do better to dance with me than to stare at that old fool of a shepherd," she said.

Judas restrained himself from rebuking her. "Just a moment," he said. "First I must greet the rabbi and the other guests."

"You never have time for me," she said, and she turned to Gaulo, who had carried her away that afternoon in the vineyard, but had not asked her to marry him. And that of course was a violation of the customs of the harvest feast.

5

"Commander," the Procurator Pontius Pilate said impatiently, "I have been in Judea long enough now to know what to do. My life guard and the other cohorts will march into Jerusalem as if the city had just been taken. That will be a fit demonstration for this recalcitrant population."

The commander, Marcus Rufus, was aware of the cold determination on Pilate's face. He looked calmly, a little curiously, into the pale gray eyes now flashing angrily. They were seated in the Procurator's library, stiffly facing each other across the long marble table. They had been discussing their many difficulties, especially in Judea, where the people were more stubborn than in Galilee and in Samaria. Marcus Rufus kept silent now, giving up any idea of convincing the Procurator of his opinion.

"My experiences, Rufus, have been very trying."

Marcus Rufus nodded. "The Jews are a stubborn people indeed. Moreover the Procurator has directives from Rome and Antioch that are not exactly flexible."

The justness of this remark irritated Pilate still more. "Yet I shall have to follow them, Marcus Rufus," he said sullenly.

"I cannot alter my opinion, Procurator, that a serious conflict with the population there in Jerusalem should be avoided. The result will be to make the Jews stop paying taxes—certainly the worst thing in the eyes of Caesar and the administration in Rome. These are conflicts not mentioned in the directives."

"Do you mean to tell me these people would be less aggressive if we avoided all offence?"

A smile broke now on Rufus' round good-natured face. "The Procurator knows the Jews much better than I thought."

Pilate's face, too, became less tense. "One question, Rufus. Would you, a soldier, ever hesitate to enter any town whatsoever in the Roman Empire at the head of your men with the standards and the emblems of Caesar?"

"No, Procurator, except Jerusalem. For the population, considering this the worst profanation of their holy city, would rise as one man against us."

There was again that angry flash in Pilate's pale eyes as he said, "Consequently, the Roman soldier has to lay aside his marks of honor for fear of the Jews and their heathenish idolatry. Not under any circumstances will I give in to these miserable zealots. You, Rufus, are too much influenced by your long stay here. You, a soldier with war experience, will see to it that the standards are protected."

"I know how to punish offences, Procurator," Rufus said angrily, "but my sword cannot catch all the dirt of the gutters of Jerusalem that will be thrown at the emblems of Caesar and the eagles. *I* would not bring one standard within the walls of that cursed city."

"I shall not follow your advice," Pilate said. "Therefore, my orders are that you at the head of my life guard, followed by the cohorts of the Seventh Legion with the standards, the silver eagles, the golden emblems of Caesar, all the marks of honor uncovered, march into Jerusalem with music and the trumpets sounding!"

"As the Procurator commands," Rufus answered dryly.

"Do you still have any question?"

"May I ask the Procurator for this command in writing and also the favor of giving a written reply?"

Pilate looked sharply at Rufus, but he did not detect any irony in the formal expression on Rufus' otherwise good-natured face. Then, visibly irritated, shrugging his shoulders, he nodded.

The commander saluted and left.

Pontius Pilate remained at the table without moving, his head in his hand. He did not feel so certain now. Thinking the matter over he considered that there might be some truth in Rufus' words. He took up a sketch-map of Judea and Galilee with all the roads. Suddenly he got an idea. He himself could arrange the day's marches, and he could have the troops enter Jerusalem in the dark of night. Then the standards could be carried uncovered and would not attract attention. They could be set up in his palace. Hastily making notes he carefully arranged the entry. He studied the date. There would be no moonlight, then. A smile of satisfaction came to his long pale face as he finished with a special directive for Marcus Rufus. The commander was ordered to take the most extensive measures to insure that his troops behave in a dignified and peaceful manner, although his duty was to protect the honor of Caesar and of the Roman Empire.

When Danio came in, he received the order in the Procurator's own handwriting, and brought it to Marcus Rufus, who read it attentively.

"Secretary, please write this down," Marcus Rufus said. "I, Marcus Rufus, declare herewith that I will scrupulously execute the orders of the Procurator, and will in no way deviate from the directives given to me. Nevertheless, as military commander of Judea I consider it my duty to point out to the Procurator that a revolt will be the inevitable consequence of the execution of his orders, the responsibility for which I must decline. And, Danio, don't forget to take a receipt with you and have the Procurator himself sign it."

Marcus Rufus was riding at the head of his men into Jerusalem. He had executed exactly the orders of the Procurator. The life guard and some cohorts of the Seventh Legion were carrying with them not only their standards with all the marks of honor but also the images of Caesar, uncovered. There had been music, too, and the loud flourish of the trumpets in conformity with Pilate's orders, but once within the walls of the city Rufus had immediately forbidden all unnecessary noise. The march into the town took place in the middle of a moonless night; it was pitch-black. Followed by eighteen men on horseback, Marcus Rufus, tired and indifferent, rode through the sleeping town. He was thinking of Pontius Pilate. That poor beginner imagined himself to be all-powerful and acting with finesse. He had badly underrated the vehemence and fanaticism of the Jewish mind. Rufus had done everything to avoid this dangerous and unnecessary conflict. He had failed entirely and he had no illusions about the outcome. It was silent still, but in a few hours the storm would break. The dark side streets and alleys seemed deserted. Then he saw a figure fleeing along the walls and a sharp cry sounded through the night. A Jew had seen the emblems of Caesar.

An almost kindly smile came to the face of the Roman commander. Involuntarily he dug his spurs into the horse's flanks, but then he restrained it again. He would not hurry his troops. Marching quietly they could still reach the tower of Antonia before the fury of the population broke out. He would prepare the tower of Antonia and the Praetorium for defense. Then he could not be taken by surprise.

The uselessness of this conflict irritated him as much as the prospect of the quibbles with Rome and the complicated and time-devouring explanations necessary to change this stupidity into an act of great wisdom. This would be the more necessary because Vitellius in Antioch had his own source of intelligence in Judea, and passed all information on to Rome.

An hour after the entry the whole town of Jerusalem was heaving. At dawn, Marcus Rufus saw that all the Roman buildings were surrounded by a dense crowd, wildly yelling and gesticulating. The tidings had spread that heathenish idols, demonic images of the despised Caesar Tiberius had been brought in great secrecy inside the walls of the holy city of Jerusalem, and now already their pestiferous influence was perceptible. In the minds of all was only one thought: away, away with these idols. They must be destroyed, broken to pieces and trampled upon. Even if it cost the lives of thousands of them, it would be a small sacrifice. The Romans must be punished, whipped like dogs and chased outside Jerusalem. The Almighty would support and strengthen them.

As this yelling sounded in the ears of Marcus Rufus he, though profoundly annoyed, burst out in a loud laugh. The centurion who stood near him stared in astonishment. The laugh sounded so strange. One could never know in this land of the Jews—the commander would not be the first Roman who had lost his mind here.

Calm and sure of himself, Pontius Pilate had stayed in Caesarea. Danio had tried earnestly to persuade him to put the palace into some state of defense, but Pilate had dismissed him with a sneer. The first day after the march into

Jerusalem Pilate had not yet received any message from Marcus Rufus, but on the second morning Jews in large numbers appeared before the palace. Jews of all classes, clad in all the costumes of the country, all ages from children to grayhaired men, were present. They had come from Judea and Galilee, from Jerusalem and the coast. Many were praying, crowded in front of the windows and doors of the palace, others were running around like sheep dogs driving their flocks nearer. Many threw themselves on the road, on the terraces and lawns, rolling about as though stricken with grief, their bodies barring the entries of the palace. The Procurator had ordered his soldiers to chase them away with the shafts of their lances and the flats of their swords. No blood should flow. Tired out, covered with dirt, hooted at and insulted, the soldiers returned, unsuccessful. In answer to their request to be allowed to use their weapons, they were ordered to remain within the palace. And hour by hour the crowd grew larger, yelling, threatening and supplicating without a moment of respite.

Claudia Procula saw the sortie of the life guard. She hastily went to her husband and implored him not to have these people killed. He assured her that the Jews had no weapons and no one would be harmed. This might last perhaps for several days and nights, but then, forced by hunger and thirst, they would surely disperse and go home. He was patient. He, Pontius, would not yield.

For the moment Claudia had been reassured, but her terror and alarm came back every time she looked down at the figures rolling about. She had her sitting-room closed off with heavy drapes, but the closed sunblinds of the gallery in front of it rattled now and then when mud struck them. The shouts reached her, sometimes loud and threatening, then falling off in lamentations that sounded like dirges. The passions of this crowd had a strange, unnerving effect, Claudia mused. When driven by her restlessness she looked out through a fold of drapes, she saw a venerable old man suddenly run up to a Roman soldier, throwing himself down and embracing his feet, supplicating him to kill him on the spot. A young man baring his chest tried to force a Roman to end his suffering with his sword. A young centurion attempted placating words. It was like pouring oil on fire; his good words were shouted down.

Quickly Claudia closed the drapes. For a long time she sat in thought. Pontius had brought about this horrible situation unnecessarily. He had the best advisers, and yet he turned against their warnings. She felt a great desperation; Pontius was like one walking in a dream.

She was disturbed by a servant announcing Manlius, a cousin of Pontius—his secretary. She nodded to show him in. He came in so quickly that her face still expressed her thoughts.

Manlius noticed it. "Is this Jewish chorus not more beautiful than the Greek ones we hear in Rome?" he asked airily. "Are these harmonies not flattering to your delicate ears, my dear cousin?"

His tone irritated Claudia. "Who is at fault for all this?" she asked coolly.

Manlius seemed embarrassed. "Would it not be better, Claudia Procula, to put this question to Pontius Pilate himself?"

"Could Danio have given him better advice?" she insisted.

"That little schemer?"

"I mean the secretary, Manlius."

"I too."

"What has he said to Pontius?"

"Said? He roared like a lion. He accused the Procurator of scheming to kill off the whole people of Judea in a massacre. Indeed, a respectable plan. After that he toned down a little, and pointed out to your husband that six Jewish ambassadors have left for Rome a short time ago as the story goes, ostensibly on matters of the corban, the treasure of the temple, but in reality to prevent the profanation of Jerusalem at all cost. They have at their disposal all the gold of the temple treasure. So, besides intrigues, they have something to offer to our almighty Sejanus. He, as you know, Claudia, can always use gold for his costly festivities. This news has made Pontius uncertain, I feel, though he didn't show it. And Danio has done something of which Pontius has not the slightest idea."

"What is it, Manlius, tell me."

"Our high protector, Danio, has sent couriers to Jerusalem, overriding their horses, to call back Marcus Rufus. I think that he and Rufus will with their own hands raise up these martyrs from the mud and wash them clean. But now I must be going, dear cousin, to the rhythm of the harmonious sounds of Judea. Claudia, take care of your ears. A thick scarf might help." And Manlius went out waving his hand.

On the way to his workroom he burst out laughing. He might better have recommended a thick scarf to Pontius, since his good wife would soon begin to recount her many grievances.

The morning of the sixth day came and the noise outside the palace was a loud as ever. The first nights Pontius Pilate had enjoyed an excellent sleep. It was as if he were again a soldier in the field, and the troops were noisily breaking camp while he himself could still stay a little in his field cot. Yet he saw Claudia Procula becoming more and more pale and worn out. He was now so embittered that he did not care any more. A Roman woman must be strong; she had to share the duties of her husband. The honor of Caesar and the empire were at stake. Her sickly love for the Jews made no sense whatsoever. It was his business, not hers, if the heads of the Jews rolled in the mud. This morning he had refused to say a word about the insurrection, or to give her any promise of its appeasement. She should understand what was coming. And Danio, too, he had coldly told to leave the library. Danio was standing now in the midst of the crowd vainly trying to bring them to their senses. What he is telling them must be lies, Pilate thought, for the secretary did not even know that he, the Procurator, had already irrevocably resolved to punish the Jews in the arena. At noon he would have them summoned there, where he himself would receive their deputations. If they refused, his soldiers would drive them there. And if they would still not give in, he would have them slaughtered like cattle. He had been insulted for five full days. His cup was full. Now he would take action with an iron hand. With a firm step he left his library to give his orders to the centurion of the guard. But he did not find him.

At this moment the military commander with a decurion and six horsemen rode at full gallop toward the palace. As the crowd parted willingly, Rufus quickly dismounted and entered the palace. He used the side entrance of the library, and as he opened the heavy drapes Pilate looked up.

"You here, Rufus?" he said coolly. "I thought you were indispensable in Jerusalem."

Marcus Rufus looked him calmly in the eyes. "There the situation is not dangerous, Procurator. The emblems have been taken to the tower of Antonia, the Praetorium and the fortifications have been put into a state of defense, our soldiers are patrolling the city. If the Procurator so commands me, I can have the standards carried through all of Jerusalem in broad daylight." There was a challenge in Rufus' calm tone.

"What are you aiming at, Rufus?" Pilate asked angrily.

"I know what the Procurator is aiming at: a massacre at any cost. I hear that the deputations have been summoned to go to the arena and that the people will be driven there too, so that when the gates are closed the killing off can begin. That is your plan, is it not?"

"Something like it," Pilate said indifferently. "The Jews started this revolt and they must be defeated."

An almost pitying smile lit Rufus' face. "This time the Procurator is making a mistake. The deputations will appear before you with bared chests and they themselves will demand to be killed by the Roman swords. In this manner the Procurator, a courageous Roman soldier, will suffer a defeat, not the Jews."

"Rufus, what do you really want? Must I then humiliate myself? Must I, to please this rabble, permit the honor of Caesar, the empire, and the Roman legion to be tarnished?"

"You must avoid tarnishing this honor forever by staging this tragedy in the arena. Give me a free hand and I will settle the purely military matter of the standards and give satisfaction to the deputations. And let Sejanus in Rome have his gold from the Jews. That doesn't do us any harm."

"It is too late now, Rufus. I will not, I cannot go back on my decision. I, myself, will go to the arena . . ." Suddenly he fell silent, for the face of Claudia Procula, deathly pale, appeared at the library entrance.

"Rufus," she said, in despair, "I cannot stand it any longer."

"I am only waiting for the word of the Procurator to go out and make peace, noble lady."

"Go then and make an end to it!" Pilate said furiously. This was the greatest defeat of his life.

Rufus took off his sword and went. Outside he called Danio a few words in Latin. Danio repeated these loudly in Aramaic to the people. They listened attentively, then they burst out in a stream of distrustful questions that Danio answered calmly, saying that they could go safely to the arena, where the deputations would be received. And there they would have good news.

In small groups the crowd left the square before the palace, some talking and gesticulating, others silent, exhausted. The Almighty had given them the victory. The arrogant Roman, the heathen oppressor of Judea, had been forced to bend his proud head. He, there in the palace, would think a second time before starting a new struggle with them.

Judas, who had come to Caesarea with some men from Kerioth, had taken part in all the manifestations of the crowd. His father did not come with him. His mother had asked him not to encourage his father to make the long journey; his health was not good enough. But Judas knew she feared her impetuous husband might say and do things that would get him into trouble. Arisio had not come either. The very presence in Jerusalem of any Roman soldier, he told Judas, was a desecration of the Holy City. And now the Romans had brought their idols with them. That was the last straw. He was too old now, but Judas should go with other men of Kerioth and support the leaders of the people in whatever they decided to do.

Shortly before noon Judas, together with the others came to the main entrance of the arena. The groups of delegates were lining up. The high priest, Caiaphas, the chief rabbis and priests of the temple, the scribes, Sadducees, and Pharisees had all sent their representatives. Most of them had waited all this time to be received by the Procurator. Judas looked attentively at the mighty of the land. He saw how cold and aggressive were the expressions on their faces. When a voice called, "Time, it is time," he saw many tear open their garments to bare their chests, and, as they prayed, they sprinkled ashes on their heads. Then, chanting songs of lamentation, they entered the arena.

Judas went quickly to the amphitheatre to find a seat. He saw that all eyes were looking to the box of the Procurator, where a mighty golden eagle was on display, but the seats were still empty. A loud flourish of trumpets announced the arrival of the Procurator, but instead of Pontius Pilate himself it was the military commander Marcus Rufus who entered, self-confident and with great dignity, accompanied by two centurions and the Jewish secretary Danio, who for the past six days had tried to reassure the crowd in front of the palace. Solemnly the commander sat down in the seat of the Procurator, the centurions standing at attention on both sides. Three rows of soldiers surrounded him, but not one of them carried a sword or a lance.

Only part of the seats in the amphitheatre were taken by Jews. The people of Caesarea, mindful of their pledge never to enter the arena, had refused to come. They stood crowded together in front of the open gates, peering inside. Singing their lamentations, the deputations approached the tribune of the Procurator. There they halted in dead silence.

The deputy of the high priest asked to speak. Loud sounded his shrill voice, "We have come to speak to the Procurator, only the Procurator."

"The Procurator, the Procurator," the crowd shouted.

Marcus Rufus waited and smiled calmly around him. After many gestures of the deputies the crowd fell silent. In the commanding voice of a soldier Rufus shouted, "The Procurator has sent me, the military commander of Judea, to settle the matter of the standards. I am ready to do so."

"Idols! Satanic idols! Desecration of the Holy City!" the crowd yelled. And from the rows of deputies came a confused chorus, "Kill us, rather, kill us. We cannot suffer any longer the desecration of Jerusalem."

Judas saw that many more of the deputies were tearing their robes to bare their chests. Seeing the smile on the face of the military commander he feared, in his ignorance, that the Romans would start to kill them off.

"Kill you?" shouted Rufus. "That is a wish I cannot satisfy. Not one of my soldiers is carrying a weapon. We have come to make peace and not to harm anybody."

Judas felt relieved, but the deputies seemed totally disconcerted in their exaggerated postures. He was astonished that the cries of the deputies did not seem to make any impression on the Roman.

The deputy of the high priest decided to let the heathen speak first and then attack him. "If what the commander has said is true," he said, "would he then first explain the violations of our rights that he himself has committed. We will listen." The crowd became silent. Rapt, Judas listened to the commander who now spoke in a loud voice.

"Very well then. You, citizens of Judea and Galilee, all know the wisdom of your fathers who, when your great king Herod died, sent fifty select ambassadors to Rome with the request to impart to their people and country the honor of being integrated in the Roman Empire. They made only one condition, and rightly so, that your religious rights, the freedom and the authority of the temple, and the law of Moses be maintained. Since that time every Roman, the Procurator of Judea first of all, cherishes the sincere wish to respect your religious opinions and customs. When you with the loud sound of trumpets bring the holy water to the temple at Jerusalem, every Roman soldier will respectfully step aside. But how are you acting with respect to us peace-loving Romans? I, myself, have brought our very holy standards to the Roman tower of Antonia in the middle of the night, in complete darkness and without any sounding of trumpets. And now you still dare to insult us, saying that we, have purposely desecrated your city."

"Away with the idols," the people cried. But Marcus Rufus silenced them with an impatient movement of his hand and said, "I beg the deputy of the high priest to express his wishes."

The deputy said stubbornly, "My wish is to speak to the Procurator himself."

"I have told you that the Procurator has commanded me to give ear to your wishes. If you don't want to express them, then I will go."

After a short whispered conversation with the others the deputy said they had two wishes, the first being the removal of the standards considered idols by the whole people, the second a conversation with the Procurator himself.

"Your first wish will be granted. A cohort of honor will bring our holy standards outside the walls of the city." Loud cheering sounded in the arena. "But on the one condition," Rufus continued calmly, "that your citizens who are so afraid of desecration will not disturb the ceremony. In hearing your cries of 'kill us' we assumed that you were about to break the Roman peace. If the removal of the standards takes place without incident the Procurator will receive your deputations. If you are looking, however, for other pretexts to stage an insurrection, then your reception will take place in the galleys. These are my words." And the commander Marcus Rufus, after having raised his hand in the Roman salute, withdrew from the tribune in a dignified way, followed by his guard.

Judas sat motionless. Around him was some cheering that suddenly stopped. Near him a man cried, "That cursed heathen is as slippery as an eel."

The deputies, in spite of the favorable outcome, were nevertheless not satisfied. They had not succeeded in humiliating the Procurator himself by compelling him to give in to their demands. Now they could only go home, inconspicuously straightening their robes over their bare chests and wiping the ashes from their heads.

Judas, confused and tired, joined the men going back to Kerioth. Along the roads and in the overcrowded khans he saw the people behaving as if they were heroic conquerors, bragging, strutting, and drinking. They seemed more inspired by bellicosity than by religious conviction. They did not even comprehend that it was to the will of the Almighty that the Romans had given in. They attributed everything to their own great merit. Who could ever liberate such people either from the Romans or from their own sins? Silent and disappointed, Judas went home.

6

The interest Arisio had in Judas as a boy had changed through the years to a warm feeling of friendship for the serious man he had become. Often Judas went to Arisio to talk with him about his many worries. One day as they were standing in front of Arisio's house, they heard the warning call of a leper, "Unclean, unclean!" The people in the street scattered. Only Arisio, unperturbed, stayed where he was, and so did Judas.

Suddenly the sick man cried, "Peace be with you, Arisio, peace and prosperity."

Arisio, surprised, recognized with difficulty his old comrade, the guerrilla Thaddeus. When Arisio saw that the sick man had no food in his shoulderbag, he went into the house and came back with a basketful of food and medicinal herbs and a pitcher of wine. Moved by Arisio's kindness, Thaddeus called him a son of God. But Arisio only shook his head, smiling, and told him to come back any time he needed something. To hearten the sick man, Arisio spoke of the preacher of Nazareth, who healed lepers. The tired eyes in the ravaged face looked gratefully to Arisio, and as Thaddeus went on his way it seemed to Judas that his call "Unclean, unclean" sounded less desperate. Arisio watched him limp away. "The prophet of Nazareth," he said, "teaches that lack of love to others is a greater uncleanness than the sickness of Thaddeus."

"Do you think it possible, Arisio, that this prophet is really the Messiah, who has come to deliver us as so many believe?"

"Whether he is the Messiah or not we must prepare ourselves for the kingdom he announces. We can no longer eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence. We must live in wisdom and understanding."

When Judas came home and told his father about the leprous guerrilla, Simon was startled. Thaddeus a leper? Why should he have deserved this punishment? He remembered Thaddeus as being about as tall as he was and told Cyborea to prepare a mantle and some warm underwear for Judas to take to Arisio for Thaddeus.

"I can give it to him myself, father," Judas said.

"You must not go near a leper, Judas," Cyborea said, frightened.

Judas answered that it made little difference whether or not one went near a leper because the malady was a judgment of God, wasn't it? Cyborea looked in astonishment at her son. How sincere and grave the expression on his face had become in the last few years. Although he often spoke in sharp rebellious words she knew very well that his actions were motivated by reflections rather than by impulses. He was now a tall strong man, her son. Looking at him it was easy to see in his figure a similarity to the Samaritan. Again she felt that familiar sinking feeling within her.

"Cyborea," Simon said, "don't look so worried. Judas will not get leprosy from Thaddeus." But Cyborea did not answer, and lost in thought she left the room. It struck Simon how melancholy Cyborea was at times. And Judas was too serious for his years. The lightheartedness and joy of youth were missing somehow. Thoughtfully Simon's gaze rested on a cedar in front of the house. It was a tree planted on the day Judas was born and, according to the old custom, it would be cut on the day of his marriage.

Guessing his father's thoughts, Judas said, "You are looking at my tree."

"It would give enough wood for a wedding canopy. And sometimes I wonder where the acacia has grown in honor of the bride of my son."

"There are enough girls and acacia trees about, Father. But a bride must be desired by the bridegroom."

"And is there among the girls of Kerioth no one you desire as a bride?"

"You are afraid, Father, that my cedar will grow too high. But at the harvest feasts I have observed these girls. My bride must be different, quite different. She must be as beautiful as a rose of Sharon with eyes as pure as the waters of Hesbon."

"So it says in the Song of Songs, Judas. But to find beauty and purity in real life is difficult."

"I know it, Father. There is nothing but impurity all around us. If you and the other patriots had succeeded in freeing our people from the Roman slavery, what would you have found in coming back? A people living in impurity, the slaves of their own passions, their greed, their struggle for gold and their sensual pleasures."

"These are harsh words, Judas. Our men certainly are not without sins, but. . . ."

"Better to say they live for their sins," Judas said heatedly. "They betray all moral principles. Herod, it is true, has lined the streets with evil houses, but it is the synagogues that support them for the gold it brings them, and that should be an abomination to them."

"They cannot do without gold, Judas."

"The rich merchants should give it directly to the synagogue. You would never refuse a gift to the temple, would you?"

"You are right, Judas. But sometimes the flesh is weak," Simon said meekly.

"The flesh is weak, because they are unbelieving sinners. That too is the reason they go to Hierapolis to the feast of the heathen goddess Astarte, where young girls must sacrifice their innocence. And then how they talk—those men who were so faithfully united with their spouses under canopies of cedar and acacia!"

"I see that my son ponders many matters."

"Father, you sincerely believe in acts of violence to liberate our people. But the rich Jews in Rome and elsewhere do not desire a liberation from the Romans with whom they celebrate their infamous bacchanalia. They keep slaves and with their unclean feet they go into the holy temple to bring their offerings of gold. They defile the temple by their presence. Yet the priests honor them, and the people acclaim them when they are carried about in their luxurious litters. I am convinced, Father, that a true delivery should also be an inner cleansing. And there is only one way: that of the Lord God of Israel."

Silently Simon looked at the strong face of his son with the fiery locks about it, and saw the fervent zeal in his sparkling eyes. "Perhaps you are right, Judas," he said.

The following morning, when Judas went with the garments for Thaddeus, to his astonishment he found the door and shutters of Arisio's house closed. But when he knocked the door was opened, and Arisio asked him to come in. Then, in the semidarkness of the room Judas saw a tall man, still young, with a narrow sharp face whose piercing eyes were fixed on him. Arisio called him Eleazar and said they could trust each other as they were both sons of patriots. Eleazar came from Jerusalem, where he had escaped just in time the persecutions of the Romans.

Judas looked closely at the slim wiry man, undoubtedly hardened by a life of adventures and privations. He saw both fighting spirit and foolhardiness on his bold, tanned features. He had no doubt Eleazar was one of those roving zealots.

At Arisio's request Eleazar told about the recent attack of the Romans. Without suspecting trouble, Eleazar had gone to the temple. At the entrance were Roman soldiers, riffraff of the Gallic and Teutonic auxiliaries, drinking wine from big jars. Inside the temple court, too, sounded the drunken voices of Roman mercenaries. When he politely had asked a soldier why, against the orders of Pontius Pilate, they had entered the temple grounds, a decurion had threatened him with his sword shouting that he had insulted the Procurator. Unarmed, he could not defend himself and he saw no way of escape. Then an old merchant approached and said jokingly to the decurion that good wine was still better if drunk in the company of beautiful women. And he had given the soldier a gold drachma, saying that gold had no evil smell even if it came from a Jew. The decurion was surprised, but quickly snatched the gold piece.

"The merchant and I," Eleazar continued, "went up the nineteen steps to the second terrace, where there were no Roman hirelings. No music of lutes, or harps, or silver cymbals sounded in the temple. But the drunken shouts of the soldiers below we could hear everywhere. ooking behind me I saw a young man running up the steps pursued by drunken soldiers with drawn swords. One of them fell, and the young man quickly picked up his sword and thrust it at the nearest soldier. I rushed forward determined to defend, with the young man, the steps to the second terrace. But the decurion shouted to his soldiers to come back and wait till the others of the tower of Antonia and of the life guard had come. We knew that no one would escape alive from the temple so we followed the merchant down to a small unguarded side door. We were just in time, for some moments later the Roman cohorts surrounded the temple and stormed into it killing all, even those hidden near the holy of holies." Eleazar stopped as an expression of hatred came over his sharp face. Judas and Arisio listened, horrified. "Always we are powerless against them," said Eleazar bitterly.

"But one day the liberation must come," Judas burst out. "Certainly the God of Israel has never laid burdens on his people that they could not bear."

Arisio said reflectively, "Everywhere it is said that the Liberator has come already in the land of Galilee, and many believe him to be the Messiah. He performs miracles, heals the sick, and teaches of the kingdom that is to come."

"They say he is a pupil of the baptist John," Eleazar said, "who is now a prisoner of Herod in the fortress of Makor."

"John a prisoner? Why?" Judas exclaimed. "He is a holy man."

"As soon as the crowd flocks to a preacher, the mighty say he endangers the public safety," Eleazar said sarcastically.

"I was baptized by John," Judas said in a sad voice, "as also was one of our shepherds. Never shall I forget the words he spoke to me. He announced the kingdom and he admonished the people to repent, even the rich. He knew no fear."

"I heard he was noble and fearless when he stood before the Tetrarch," Eleazar said. "He is not the man to have smooth words for the sins of a man like Herod. The baptist is a lost man. With his fiery soul he cannot compromise with corruption, and the Tetrarch will surely not mend his ways for fear of the baptist's wrath. Fortunately the Nazarene is still free and he will probably achieve more than John."

"I would do anything," Judas said, "to see this Nazarene and hear him preach. I want to know if he is truly the chosen one who will deliver us."

"Come with me to Galilee, Judas," Eleazar said. "I roam through the whole country, from the hamlets of the fishermen to the farms and even the cities of the Romans—everywhere—to rally those who are willing to fight. There we will find the prophet."

Arisio agreed with Eleazar. But Judas was silent, lost in thought. His eyes had a searching look, and his head was lowered as if listening to an inner voice. Again he saw John's coal-black eyes fixed on him, his hairy coat and leather girdle. Then suddenly it was as if he heard again the baptist's words about the straight path and the king and the new kingdom. And he could see himself going straight forward to a far light holding John's palm branch in his raised hand. Without further hesitation he said, "I will go with you, Eleazar."

Deep in thought, Judas sat in the big room at home. It was one of his last days in Kerioth. That morning for the last time he had gone to the vineyards. He had looked at the vines he might never tend again. In the distant valley he saw the fields where he had driven the plow with the heavy gray oxen. He had looked at the meadows, where the sheep and lambs were still grazing. They had not been sold to Jerusalem because there was no profit in it. The Sadducees, the guardians of the temple, the merchants and hagglers, had formed a powerful group controlling the trade in sacrificial animals. Judas had been outraged by this injustice. He had tried to force his father to seek justice, but Simon had shaken his head, saying it was useless to insist on one's right when one had no power to enforce it.

"Consequently our white lambs cannot be sacrificed to the Almighty," Judas had said angrily.

"Our white lambs would be branded leprous in Jerusalem, if we did not give up our profits to these people."

Cyborea entered the room and whispered, frightened, that Ismael the toll gatherer was coming to the house. Simon reassured her and went to the door. Judas looked with displeasure at the small figure entering the room. Ismael's face was yellow and as wizened as a fruit without juice. With his one eye he looked slyly about. "Sit down, Ismael," said Simon. "I suppose you have come again to fleece us poor sheep. Don't deal with us too harshly this time."

"You've guessed it, Simon. I've come to speak about the new taxes."

"Again?" exclaimed Judas who was standing at the end of the table.

"Come now, Judas, no quarrels," Simon said with a warning look at his son. "Let us drink a cup of wine together. And if you like this wine, Ismael, I will give you a pitcher to take home."

Cyborea poured the wine, her hands trembling. Raising his cup Ismael said, "Peace and good health to you, Simon, and also Judas."

"I would rather die," Judas said brusquely.

"Judas is very outspoken," said Ismael. "But I did not come to quarrel. I came to warn you that the tax cohort is already on its way to Kerioth."

"Judas will keep silent," Simon said with an angry look.

When Ismael had finished his wine he said the Romans were making a new punitive expedition in the mountains. They badly needed oxen, and would take the two pair belonging to Simon.

Simon was startled at the thought that his oxen would be used to destroy the patriots. He would rather kill the animals.

Yet his voice was calm as he asked, "How can I plow my fields and transport my wine without my oxen?"

Again angry words were on the tip of Judas' tongue, but he kept his temper. Ismael tried to smooth matters over. He understood Simon's difficulties, so maybe together they could find a way out. His one eye half-closed, he asked how many lambs Simon still had. When Simon answered, "Seventeen," Ismael knew he did not tell the truth. But he did not show it and asked airily whether Simon would make a proposal, so they could come to an agreement.

"What proposal can we make, when the only oxen we have are at stake," Judas asked angrily.

Simon ordered Judas to keep silent and said to Ismael, "You buy seven of my lambs." Emphatically he repeated, "You buy them, I said."

"For how much?" Ismael said eagerly.

"For one prutah, one single copper coin of Caesar. Then, each of your children has a lamb. That will bring them good luck. You take the other ten lambs with you as payment of the new taxes. Judas will see to it that today before dark the oxen will be driven into the mountains."

Ismael thought it over a moment. Then he solemnly put one copper coin on the table. "Done," he said and there was satisfaction on his face when he left.

The door was no sooner closed than Judas burst out, "Father, I can no longer be your steward. It is best I go away. If you have to manage your property this way it would be better to let it go, the lambs, the oxen, everything. In my opinion we don't depend on this dishonest. . . ."

But Simon interrupted him. "We are taught to be prudent. And must we not prevent dishonest toll gatherers from misusing their power?"

"Father, how can you stand all this scheming?"

Simon spread his hands in resignation. "A man can stand a lot," he sighed.

Judas looked dejectedly at the floor. He saw between his feet an ant with difficulty carrying a bread crumb. It went nervously to and fro trying to find its way without being crushed. Just like that was the torturous path his father had to follow for the sake of their daily bread. For Judas this was not the way. He would seek the straight path.

Judas was busy in his bedroom selecting garments for his journey when his eyes fell on a small, finely embroidered undervest such as pilgrims wore under their cetoneth as protection against the cold. Rahab had woven it and had given it to him as a parting present. He had tried to put this last encounter with Rahab out of his mind. But now, seeing her present again, he was angry with her and perhaps even more with himself.

Some days before, his mother had called him, saying that Rahab had come to bid him goodbye. He had not hidden his sullenness, and his mother had urged him to be friendly to her now that he was going away. Rahab, radiant, had stood in the middle of the big room with her gift in her hand, and he had accepted it formally and with words of appreciation that he did not really mean. His mother had shown an exaggerated admiration to make up for his aloofness. Rahab was disappointed, and to make an end to the visit he had offered to accompany her part of the way back. His mother asked him to fill a jar with water at the well since their way went past the pond beyond the cedar grove. So they had gone together, he carrying the jar, she walking at his side with nervous little steps and talking with those excited gestures he disliked so much. He had noticed that his mother sighed as they left the room. Probably she, too, hoped that a canopy of cedar and acacia would keep him in Kerioth.

Everything had been Rahab's fault. As they walked under the cedars, piqued by his coolness, she made remarks to provoke him. Times in Kerioth, she said, were better when the Romans were there. They at least looked at the women and then the Jewish men had made sure to be the first. But now the men of Kerioth were cold and indifferent. And she had looked at him with that peculiar gaze, a special trick of hers.

But she had no more succeeded in embarrassing him than before. He had looked up to where an eagle was circling high above the pond, following it with his eyes to see whether the bird would plunge down on the lambs in the meadow. But the bird only circled higher. Turning to Rahab to point it out to her he saw her sitting at the pond, bent over the water splashing it with her hands. Her white dress had partly slid from her shoulders, showing her small breasts. It gave him such a shock that he hastily and angrily turned his head away.

Outwardly he remained calm. He had to go back home, he said. But she jumped up, rearranging her dress. With her face flushed with rage, she said she would tell him what all the girls and women of Kerioth said of him. When he did not answer, she cried in a voice growing more and more shrill that they said he was a gladiator without a sword, not a bull but an ox; not a man but an old woman.

Now, seeing that embroidered rag, Judas trembled with rage as he remembered her last words: "I say you are a eunuch, do you hear, a eunuch." He looked at her face, distorted by fury and malevolence, and her scornful laughter sounded like the lash of a whip. He lost his temper and went after her to force her to her knees, to punish her. But she fled in fear and he in his rage took a big stone and savagely threw it into the middle of the pond. A fountain spouted up, bringing him to his senses. Rahab had disappeared. And he had forgotten to fill the jar left behind at the pond.

Judas took the small embroidered garment up and looked at it. His bitterness subsided. He saw with how much care she had done the embroidery, surely filling many hours with thoughts of him. Sobbing, Rahab had confided to his mother that Judas was the only man she loved. And Cyborea had tried to console her by saying that he was not the right husband for her.

It was true. A woman like Rahab was not for him. Although she refused to admit it she felt it too, and in her disappointment she had become cruel. But he himself had failed miserably. This time he had not been able to control the dark forces within him.

He went to the big room, where Cyborea was preparing the meal. Putting the colorful garment on the table he said, "Here, Mother, this is just the right thing for Thaddeus. It will keep him warm in the cold days of winter." Giving in to a sudden feeling of resentment he added in a hard tone, "Otherwise it must go into the fire."

Cyborea's soft eyes were full of worry. "You are always so violent, Judas." Taking his hand in her small ones she said, "I would like to see my son at peace with himself now he is going so far away."

The tension disappeared from Judas' face. "Oh, Mother," he said, "sometimes I am in doubt myself whether I am truly seeking inner peace, or whether I am only a fighter."

"A fighter?" Cyborea repeated. Looking at him she suddenly saw him as a boy again, lonely, always fighting with other boys; later, when he was grown up, quarreling with Ismael the dishonest toll gatherer and others, judging so severely the other young people in Kerioth, and always arguing with Simon whose views he never seemed to accept. It was true he was high-minded, seeking after truth and constantly fighting what he thought was injustice. But he was opinionated and violent. And what would happen to him if he did not come to some wisdom and find inner peace? She sighed and, as if to console herself, said, "The preacher in Galilee teaches wisdom and brings peace to people's hearts, Arisio told me. I'm sure you, too, will learn from him, Judas." But there was doubt in her heart.

Just after sunset Judas strode through the fields to the house of the old rabbi Emmanuel. On the horizon, behind the darker slopes of the hills, gold and purple isles were still visible. There was no wind. The first stars twinkled in the sky; all was peaceful and quiet. Here and there a cricket started its evening song. Suddenly Judas heard how his hasty step disturbed the evening. He stood still and looked about the landscape of his youth he was soon to leave. In the distance he saw feeble yellow lights mysteriously flickering in the semidarkness. So the old rabbi was already seated near the three lamps, one to the left, one to the right, and one in front of him.

Now, walking more slowly, he remembered an event in his youth, when before daybreak, on his way to Jacob and Aram, he passed the house of the rabbi and saw the lights still burning. The door was open, and though a little afraid, he had looked inside. He had seen the rabbi in his high chair, his head resting on the back with the three flickering oil lamps near him. The eyes of the rabbi were wide open and he seemed to be looking into the far distance. Fearing that the old man was dying, perhaps dead already, he had hurried inside and had touched his arm, asking him if something was the matter. The rabbi moved his head as one who awakens from a deep sleep. He closed his eyes, and as he reopened them they were the same kind eyes Judas knew so well. The rabbi reassured him that he was not ill. But sometimes his eyes were opened that he might see that which was not of this world. Then the rabbi rose and gave him candied fruit and a remedy for Jacob's sick goat. Judas had been very much afraid and as he ran up the mountain path he had looked back several times. But Jacob had told him there was no reason to be afraid. The old rabbi talked with the angels to become wise, and with the three lamps he drove off the devils, who wanted to tell him falsehoods. The rabbi was no sorcerer but a man who was seeking wisdom, just like the prophets.

Judas smiled at the recollection of his childish fears. Yet as he neared the house he hesitated a moment as if he feared to disturb the mysterious atmosphere. The curtain of the rabbi's room was half open and as Judas entered, the old man looked up from the Torah. He wrapped a gold cloth around the scroll and put it away. There was joy on his old face.

"I knew that you would come to me tonight," he said.

"Rabbi," Judas said after the customary greetings, "You know that I am going to hear the prophet of Nazareth." His eyes fixed on Judas, Rabbi Emmanuel nodded approvingly.

"Arisio, too, thinks that maybe he is the Messiah," said Judas, "and that he may liberate us with the sword."

"Arisio is a good man, Judas, as long as he doesn't put power above wisdom."

Judas looked at the face of the old man, very pale in the flickering lights. He had found wisdom and peace.

In a quavering voice the rabbi added, "The Messiah will come. The signs are there. Whether you really find him will depend on you, Judas. A king in a beggar's cloak may yet be recognized as a king. But the Messiah living among us will not be recognized by many." As if invoking higher powers the rabbi raised his withered hands in which the veins were like blue strings. Then his friendly smile returned.

"One day, Judas, as a little boy you asked me how large was the bed of King Solomon to have enough room for his thousand wives. I answered that nowhere did the Scriptures mention this. Now, you will encounter on your way many who will pose questions in the same way as you did then. For it is given to very few to understand the truths hidden in the Scriptures.

"Therefore the Almighty sent his angels and spoke through the mouths of the prophets to his chosen people. But common mortals can also receive teachings in the way of wisdom. So we initiated learn that two-and-thirty different roads are open to every man and that there are fifty gates leading to the Most Holy, to divine truth and wisdom. Joshua reached the forty-eighth gate, the Prophet Moses came to the forty-ninth. But this gate was not opened to him, and it was then called the Gate of Prudence, for God said to Moses: "You will not contemplate my countenance." The fiftieth gate remained closed to King Solomon, for it is that of God himself. Though King Solomon passed through all the degrees of wisdom, knowledge, and truth he did not attain the state of perfection. Yet his wisdom was as profound as the waters of the sea and as infinite as the grains of sand in a desert."

Spellbound Judas listened to the strange words the rabbi had spoken in a quiet voice. Now, again resting his head on the back of his tall chair, the old man's gaze seemed fixed on the distance and his voice seemed to come from afar. "I say to you, a brief space of time yet and the Messiah will come. Seven times seven gates he will pass and will near the last gate, which is of pure gold and transparent crystal. Nearer the Messiah comes, his holy shoulders bent under a heavy burden. Then he will halt. Seven times he will knock, seven times will sound his holy words that will be heard to eternity. And the last word will be that his task is fulfilled. His burden will fall down. And seven angels will open the gate to God himself. The Messiah will go in to his throne of gold, where seven lamps spread the light of God. But the earth will tremble and twitch in the agony of death, and the skies will be like an abyss of darkness, and a black veil of mourning will be spread over Jerusalem and the holy temple."

The old rabbi fell silent. He closed his eyes as if blinded by too much light. Then he turned to Judas and said in his usual quiet voice, "Our days are dark yet, but the light is coming. The people of Israel are cast down, but the Almighty will raise us up. Victory will be ours when the light conquers the darkness."

Listening to the rabbi Judas was transported. In such sublime language the prophets must once have spoken to the people of Israel. And in his mind he saw himself striding to victory on a road with many gates that he would open with the strength of his iron will.

As if he had read his thoughts the rabbi said, "It is not given us to open the gates ourselves, Judas."

Judas asked thoughtfully. "And what happens when a man has gone through many gates, rabbi?"

"Then the Lord will make a covenant of peace with him. And for him the bondage of evil is finished. And in peace he shall enjoy the fruits of life."

"Rabbi," Judas said, "once when I was young I saw you bent over a scroll with the title 'The Secret Doctrine.' Does it speak therein of the Messiah?"

Rabbi Emmanuel nodded. "It is written that the Messiah will come radiant with the ten attributes of God. Thereto belong the golden crown and perfect wisdom, truth, knowledge, the strength to suffer, beauty and glory, and the infinite. In the Torah the Messiah shall know the most hidden arcana of the divine perfection. For in every word of the Holy Scripture a truth is hidden, even in every letter. When we use these letters we often do not know their real significance. Your father gave you the name 'Judas' thinking of his commander, Judas the Galilean. In reality your name has a deep significance."

Judas looked intently at the fine face of the rabbi that had the color of parchment in the light of the oil lamps. He seemed a mild old man now, no longer a prophet or mysterious sorcerer as he had thought of him as a boy. "Can you tell me what its significance is?" he asked.

Rabbi Emmanuel took up the scroll Judas had seen the time he was so frightened. And as the old man unrolled it Judas saw the title in big letters: "The wheels of Ezekiel, First Book of the Secret Doctrine."

"To him who can see are here unveiled the truths hidden in the Torah," the old man said, while his thin forefinger followed the lines of characters. "In the letter 'J,' the first letter of your name, lies the significance of the number ten. This number signifies the conjunction with the Almighty. The commandments received by Moses are ten in number. Ten veils enshroud the tabernacle. The number ten contains all things of the good and the true. But the letter 'J' is also the symbol of the sensual union. And however pure your life may be, yet the desires of the senses will be strong in you. And they may cause you to say and do things you do not want."

Judas kept silent, disconcerted. The rabbi must be mistaken. How was this possible for him who put purity of life above everything, and who shunned all sensual pleasures?

But bending over the scroll the rabbi continued, "In the letter 'J' lies also the significance of the kingdom. Your thinking, Judas, and your life will be ruled by it. And here looms up the mysterious power of the moon. In the decisive moments of your life the moon will shine with its silvery quiet light to purify you and to warn you against the darkness." The rabbi saw Judas looking at him in astonishment. He smiled and said, "I am no Egyptian sorcerer. I only pointed out to you some of the mysteries unveiled in this book." The old man closed his eyes; he seemed tired. "Judas, here on earth we will not see each other again, for you will not return soon."

Judas said he hoped to find the rabbi in good health when he came back. But the old man said, "The withered leaf must fall to earth and the new buds must burst open. Let us drink with peace in our souls a last cup of wine, Judas." With his shaky hands the old man took an earthen wine pitcher and filled two glasses. He gave one to Judas, and said, "Life offers us three kinds of wine. The first is the wine of falsity that is of Sodom, and that you will not drink. Beware also of the dangerous wine of Egypt, the symbol of the sciences, that often leaves black dregs behind, bitter on the tongue, and that may arouse heathenish thoughts in your mind. Let us pray that God may allow you to partake of the third wine, which is the truth and the wisdom and the mercy of God. Before you lies a difficult road, Judas. But it will lead you upwards, because the curse does not rest on you of coveting the last penny of the poor or the bread of the hunrgy. Do not, in the blindness of your own will, hammer on gates that are still closed to you. Choose no ways that are in darkness; believe in the light and the mercy of God." The old rabbi put his thin hands on Judas' head, and he spoke his blessing.

Judas thanked the rabbi and bade him goodbye. Once more, before passing the heavy curtain, he studied briefly the fine face of the old man and his eyes that already looked into eternity. On his way back he saw in the distance the three lamps of Rabbi Emmanuel shining as a single golden light in the darkness.

The following morning Simon and Cyborea accompanied their son and Eleazar to the highroad where Aram's son, who was a camel driver, was waiting with the camels. The departure from his parents weighed heavily on Judas. His life in Kerioth now lay behind him. This was the beginning of a new life. Would struggles or peace await him? Would he really find the Messiah? At his side went Eleazar, lively and bold. His presence was a great relief to Judas. It took the oppressive feeling of loneliness from him. Cyborea, who had walked next to Judas with her hand in his without saying a word, kissed him farewell as if he were still a little boy, and almost imploringly she whispered in his ear, "You must not be merely strong, Judas, but also self-possessed. Always remember that people are more often thoughtless than bad. Approach them with kindness instead of severity."

Eleazar was already in the saddle. Judas mounted quickly while Simon gave him some last advice and Cyborea with tears running down her cheeks watched her son. He spurred on his camel and as he looked back he saw his parents saying prayers of blessing.

Young Aram said that every time he went on a journey with the camels his father never failed to give him some good advice before he started.

"Your father seems to be a very wise man," Eleazar said with slight mockery, looking sideways at Aram.

"All shepherds are wise men," Aram said without the slightest hesitation, "and when the Messiah has mounted his throne the shepherds will be the first to honor him with offerings. Judas, our master, will send us word."

"So it will happen," Judas said, kindly, to Aram.

7

Some weeks before the Passover, Judas and Eleazar reached Galilee. It struck Judas how attractive this country was which was considered by the Jews a land of heathens. On all the roads, big and small, crowds of pilgrims were on their way to Jerusalem. In the lively towns and villages colorful merchandise was on display along the road. Red pomegranates, yellow lentels, and pink cactus fruit lay together on the stalls with green vegetables and dried figs. Everything was on sale, from food and clothes to camels and donkeys. Shouting boys drove their overburdened donkeys through the throng, and camels, unperturbed, went on in their rocking gait carrying wine barrels and packing cases or goatskins filled with water grotesquely dangling at their sides. The simple pilgrims bought pigeons for their sacrifices, but the rich drove oxen along with their horns covered with gold, their fodder on their backs.

Judas heard the people speaking Aramaic and Hebrew in many different accents. In the lively haggling going on everywhere only the prices seemed to belong to a common language. He thought it strange that so short a time after the massacre this many pilgrims were going to the temple.

Colorful groups from many lands passed by. Pushing each other aside, they thronged into the narrow streets of the bazaars, where the air was laden with odors of spiced foods. They bought unleavened bread and sweet fat cakes piled high on big iron platters and brightly colored sweets, golden apricot pastes, and candied dates, on which the flies were swarming.

Galilee was a land of abundance, where the fruit was jucier than in the barren hills of Judea, and it seemed to Judas that the dreaded attacks by outlaws must be exaggerations. But Eleazar told him that if they were attacked his watchword would work wonders. As Judas, disconcerted, asked him what the patriots had to do with robbers of the highways, Eleazar said that any means was good to protect oneself against spies and traitors.

In one of the towns Eleazar went to see a patriot and came back with tidings for Judas. At the moment no one knew the whereabouts of the prophet of Nazareth. But he was expected in the small towns on the Sea of Galilee far from the busy highroads. His sun was rising. The gardeners believed their trees yielded more fruit when he had passed by, and the fishermen said their catch was larger when he was in the neighborhood. Listening to his words many forgot their hatred for the Romans, others believed he would deliver them from the oppressors. Jesus of Nazareth had with him a small but devoted group of adherents, simple God-fearing men, who were inspired by his teachings and who followed him everywhere. He went from place to place, because at this time he did not want to attract the attention of the mighty in the land. Eleazar said his own route would take him through these same villages on the Sea of Galilee. So he and Judas could continue on their way together. That evening they found hospitality in the quiet house of a friend of Eleazar.

The following morning they arrived in Bethsaida Julias, a true city of the Roman Empire with a theatre, an arena, and a school for gladiators all built in white marble. Little Rome, Eleazar called it sarcastically. But Judas got the impression that the Jews he saw among the Romans, Greeks, Arabs, and even Egyptians felt perfectly happy in these surroundings of Roman luxury.

At the fountain of Julia a colorful crowd sauntered all day long in the cool shadow of the high sycomores near the marble statue of this notorious daughter of Caesar Augustus. Eleazar warned Judas not to make any remarks about the golden inscriptions praising her on the marble, for there were certainly spies in the crowd and he, Eleazar, must not draw attention to himself. He had heard that cohorts of Pilate had arrived for unknown reasons. Therefore his first visit would be to one of his informers, who was always to be found at the fountain of Julia. He was the smiling fortuneteller who sat there from morning till night selling his meaningless predictions to the passers-by.

Eleazar took a coin from his purse and handed it respectfully to the fortuneteller, who in return gave him a small papyrus chosen with great care from his supply. "Peace be with you," were the only words written on it. But some distance away Eleazar dipped the papyrus in a fountain and read: "The Romans are on the track of the zealots who escaped from Jerusalem." Eleazar tore the little scroll into small pieces and threw them away.

At this moment they saw coming through the crowd a beautiful litter heavily ornamented with gold, carried by four richly dressed slaves.

"Take a good look, Judas," Eleazar said. "This is Mary of Magdala, the famous dancer."

In the splendor of the golden litter Judas saw a young woman leaning on a cushion. Her face was surrounded by a mass of silky golden-blond hair adorned with glittering jewels. On her pale forehead she wore a great lustrous pearl, as white as a drop of milk. Her luminous blue eyes looked dreamily over the crowd. Gold bracelets glistened on her slender arms. The sunlight played in the sparkling stones of the rings on her small hand.

Judas looked at her like one who beholds a miracle. Then, as if roused from her reverie, her eyes fell on him. They looked at each other a few seconds, that seemed like an eternity to Judas. He felt as if he were standing in the rays of a miraculous light. Then the litter passed by. Near him he heard the mocking voice of Eleazar saying that the most beautiful woman in Judea and Galilee had looked at him alone. Judas felt the blood rush to his face. It was the first time he had seen a woman of perfect beauty. He was deeply moved and it was some time before he could ask in a casual tone, "Who is this woman, Eleazar?"

"Nobody knows. She is famous and notorious. Many men have given her treasures she did not ask for. She seems to be peacefulness itself, but in reality she must be possessed by many devils."

"That is impossible. She has a celestial beauty." Judas followed with his eyes the litter that was still visible above the heads of the crowd, and it seemed to him that Mary of Magdala too looked once more at him.

A sudden stir in the crowd brought Judas back to his senses. People were running to the highroad that bordered the park crying that the Roman soldiers with the prisoners were there. Following the crowd Eleazar and Judas saw the prisoners brought by a cavalry troop from Jerusalem. They were half naked, they had been walking without sandals and their feet were bleeding. Near the fountain of Julia the troop halted. The Romans dismounted and went to the well to refresh themselves. The prisoners, bound together with a thick rope, stood leaning against each other, exhausted, their eyes fixed on the water. In a loud voice the decurion threatened them with punishment if they dared move.

In answer to the question of a Greek as to what was going to happen to these prisoners, the decurion said indifferently, "They are not dangerous, so they will only go to the galleys for the rest of their lives. They are excellently treated there—when they are not rowing they can sit in their chains and sleep or loaf."

Judas trembled with rage. He should force this Roman to permit the prisoners to drink. At that moment the fortuneteller approached the decurion and gave him one of his little scrolls advising him to read it attentively. The decurion snarled that he had better use for his time.

"Even the most courageous soldier will die someday, decurion. But many may be your days," the fortuneteller said.

Reluctantly the decurion took the scroll and looked uncertainly about him.

"May I read it for you?" the Greek volunteered, and taking the papyrus he read aloud, "Do not take dead men to the galleys. Let all drink of the cool waters from the fountain. If not, you yourself will drink only a short time from the fountain of life."

For a moment the decurion stood in doubt. Then, with a surly gesture, he said to one of his soldiers, "What do I care if these fellows drink or not. Let them go to the fountain."

The prisoners did not waste time. In spite of the rope they hurried to the fountain and drank hastily. Some washed their bleeding feet. The decurion strolled away. A sigh of relief went up from the crowd. Judas saw Eleazar quietly put a pair of sandals near an old prisoner. They looked at each other without a word. Then the decurion came back and the prisoners lined up. Driven by the soldiers they went off wearily. Judas saw the old man exchange a look of understanding with Eleazar.

"He is the man who led me out of the temple," Eleazar whispered. "I just told him to take courage for I am certain to get them out."

Then Judas could no longer restrain himself. "This is intolerable!" he said." We were not even allowed to give the prisoners some water to drink. I can no longer stand this cruelty." Losing his temper he said loudly, "There must be justice, justice for us, the sons of the chosen people in our own land."

Some passers-by looked curiously at the tall figure with the flaming red hair. Eleazar whispered to Judas to keep quiet. The fortuneteller, too, approached. "Don't talk too loudly," he said. "Only our high protectors have that privilege."

These words calmed Judas down. He hurriedly followed Eleazar who had walked on, and together they went to another part of the town where the patricians lived. Eleazar said he would soon leave Judas for a while. He was going to visit a friend who was just back after a long stay in Rome.

"How can a Jew live in Rome?" Judas said heatedly," in that city of depravity, in the midst of slaveholders?"

"Balthazar is a good patriot," Eleazar said. "He went there to study the ways of the Romans and discover their weak sides. It is important to us of the resistance to be informed of the political intrigues going on in the upper circles of our rulers. My friend has certainly talked with Agrippa, our Jewish prince, who lives in Rome and has great influence on Caesar. Perhaps he has discovered new ways to undermine the Roman authority in Judea. For we must find a way to achieve our liberation."

"It is the Messiah who will liberate Israel," Judas said with firm conviction.

"But what can he do, the Messiah," Eleazar exclaimed.

"Will he go armed with heavenly power and a fiery sword against the Roman legions."

"Talking of the divine Liberator you think only of power and the sword, Eleazar," Judas said. "But I am on my way to the prophet of Nazareth who, it is said, will liberate us. And I firmly believe it is possible only with the help of our God."

Eleazar threw a skeptical glance at his friend as he walked away. Judas gazed after the zealot's energetic figure until he turned the corner. Although Eleazar did not concur with him, Judas was happy to have found such a sincere friend.

Late that afternoon the friends went to the bazaar where Eleazar had to talk to an Arab merchant, who regularly received news from the Jews who had fled to the desert. Somewhat suspicious of Eleazar's companion the Arab glanced significantly toward Judas, who was waiting nearby. Eleazar reassured him, but the Arab asked him to come to his house that evening for a talk.

Just then three gigantic figures came strolling among the shops. The tallest had yellowish blond hair, a skin as fair as a Greek woman, and a massive head on a bull neck. About his broad chest he wore a grey tunic showing his heavy muscular arms and a pair of enormous hands. As he passed Judas he slapped him jokingly with the flat of his hand on the shoulder. Judas writhed under the unexpected blow and looking up he saw the hard brutal face of the giant nearly a head above him. In a rude voice the man shouted, "Are you perhaps one of the new pupils of the fighter school?"

Judas stammered that it was a mistake. But the other, not even listening, shouted, "Your knuckles are far too weak. You need stronger fists to crush the skull of an adversary. But maybe I'll try you someday." And playfully he gripped Judas by the chest.

Eleazar left the Arab in a hurry to rescue Judas. Airily he said to the giant, "Why is the great Romelo, our most famous gladiator, wasting his art on a Jewish student of the law?" Judas tried in vain to escape the iron grip of the fighter.

"He a rabbi? A meddler in the books of Moses? Ha-Ha! Go on, man." And the fighter pushed Judas away so forcefully that he would have landed in the vegetables had not Eleazar caught him. Without looking back the three gladiators strolled on with the giant Romelo in the middle.

As Judas straightened his clothes Eleazar said jokingly that he was apparently considered a serious candidate for the fighter school, although the idea probably would not appeal to him. Judas, badly shaken up, did not answer, and they walked on in silence. But he could not put the giant out of his mind and suddenly he asked, "Are there many like him in the arena?"

"There is only one Romelo," Eleazar said. "He is invincible. But every day more of his kind come to Bethsaida for the arena, as well as to Jericho, Caesarea, and Tiberias. The blood of the subjugated peoples is cheap and it brings streams of gold to the cashiers of the arenas. This same evening while I go to see my Arab friend you can see the famous Romelo in a fight to the death with the sword against a man from the country near the Danube, especially picked for the fight."

Judas, determined to stay as far as possible from the arena, was strolling that evening through another part of the town. Lost in thought he had come to a wide street, where many women were sitting in front of the houses. Suddenly a young woman came to him and asked in a cautious whisper if he was the friend of Eleazar. As Judas nodded she asked him to come in. She had some important information for his friend, who would come later.

With some misgivings Judas followed the woman into her house. She was good-looking, with a fair skin, the rosy color on her cheeks seemed natural, and she had no antimony around the eyes. On her small, well-shaped feet she had gold-embroidered red sandals.

"Don't you like Bethsaida much better than Jerusalem?" she said. "Jerusalem, that dirty city where there is no water to cleanse yourself. At Passover-time it is better there. Then a woman can make some money. And money is necessary if one wants to remain young and good-looking. Not everybody is as rich as Mary of Magdala."

A shock went through Judas. What had this woman to do with the splendid creature in the golden litter? He scarcely listened to what she was saying to him in a cajoling voice with a studied smile on her face. Then she put her hand on his arm. Dumbfounded, he looked at her and a feeling of oppression mounted to his throat. Quickly he turned away from her and went to the door.

She saw the aversion in his eyes. "Why don't you stay? You are the friend of Eleazar, aren't you? And such a handsome man, too."

He did not answer. With trembling fingers he pulled at the door, but it was closed with two bolts.

"And we should wait for Eleazar," she said, disappointed. But as he still tried to open the door she shouted shrilly, "Miser, you are worse than a barbarian!"

Judas succeeded in withdrawing the bolts. As she tried to hold him back, he felt he would suffocate. "I have to go," he said and pushed her away.

"Go then, devil, miser, and never come back!" she yelled. As he slipped out the door, she kicked at him and her red sandal flew into the middle of the street.

Judas ran. Some streets away he stopped to recover his breath and walked on more slowly. He felt humiliated and ashamed. Why had he run away like a coward? He should have spoken seriously to her. He should not be afraid of temptations of this kind. But he had been taken by surprise.

He never had thought it possible that a bad woman could make him lose his composure. On a square he came to a little synagogue. He entered and found the place empty. In a long prayer he tried to cleanse himself from impurity.

Eleazar had not yet arrived at the khan where they would spend the night. Judas went to bed but he could not sleep. Though he was glad he had not given in, he felt he had failed. It had been his duty to admonish her to start a better life. Toward morning he fell asleep.

The next day as he told his story to his friend, Eleazar said it probably was the woman who had followed them in the bazaar the day before and had heard his name. And suddenly Eleazar burst out laughing. Judas looked at him, astonished. Then, infected by Eleazar's uncontrollable laughter, he began to laugh himself till the tears came to his eyes and he was freed from his oppression.

8

On their way to the villages on the Sea of Galilee Eleazar and Judas spent one night in a khan at some distance from Bethsaida. They arrived late in the evening. The oil lamps were spreading a weak reddish light in the big room, where at the long table in the middle some seats were still unoccupied. After the customary greetings they sat down, and the conversation that had suddenly stopped when they entered was resumed.

"One should not talk about a liberation," said a Pharisee who was seated next to Judas. "The Romans will still be here for centuries."

A young camel driver said he had heard that the Babylonians, the Greeks, and the Galileans would join the Judeans in a revolt. But nobody dared start. They all feared the battle wagons and rapid ships of the Romans.

"I believe in quite another liberation," a simple peasant said. "My father and his brother were in the khan of Bethlehem when a great miracle happened."

"In Galilee miracles happen all the time," the Pharisee said sarcastically.

"It happened as I tell you," the peasant said, unperturbed.

"The lights had been put out, and everybody had gone to bed. Then the guard called out. A great light fell from heaven. The wise men and the simple understood it. The Liberator was born. His glory illuminated the heaven and the whole earth. And this Liberator is now living in our land."

"For him who believes it," the Pharisee said, "he is perhaps this prophet of Nazareth with his handful of illiterate followers. I am sure he won't deliver us."

"But it can no longer go on like this," the caravan leader burst out. "The sinfulness of the Romans cries to heaven. With their concubines, their violence, their robberies. . . ."

"Take care, a spy," Eleazar whispered. He had seen the searching look directed at him by a man in a brown mantle, who had just entered and who approached the table. Without a look at the newcomer an old man kept the conversation going. The people should not forget, said he, that the Romans were just rulers who permitted the Jews to worship their God, and who even honored the wise men among the Jews. Indeed, the Jews had reason to honor Caesar.

Eleazar, seeing that the spy was looking at him, said indifferently, "The Jews are not always so wise. Didn't they stage a bloody battle in the temple, only a short time ago? The Romans are right to demand that justice be done."

The man in the brown mantle said sharply to Eleazar, "You are the man who gave sandals yesterday to one of the criminals."

Eleazar was indignant. "I thought I gave them to a poor old man," he said, "not to a criminal. May they burn on his feet."

Feeling them all eye him with distrust, the spy realized he had no support in this company. With an expression of disgust, he left.

"We must be prudent," the Pharisee said. "The Romans are more vigilant than ever."

The peasant went on with his story as if nothing had happened. "The wise men came from the East first to King Herod," he said, "and asked him where the King of the Jews was born. And Herod himself sent them to find him. The star and the light above Bethlehem guided them and they found the mother and the child, and they honored him with presents of gold and myrrh. Then King Herod ordered all the infants in Bethlehem massacred. Thus was fulfilled what the prophet Jeremiah predicted. But the little child had been taken safely to Egypt."

From the semidarkness at the other end of the room somebody said, "And he is the Nazarene. His father brought him back to Nazareth when King Herod died."

The words of the peasant reminded Judas of the evenings in the cave with the shepherds, when Jacob, seated near the fire, told his stories. All the creatures of childhood fantasy with whom he had populated the cave came back to life: the child, the kings and the shepherds who brought presents, and the angels who had come to admire his palm branch. Again he heard the words of the baptist, "You will follow him, the king of the new kingdom. Carry the palm branch with joy and humility."

Early one morning Judas and Eleazar reached the top of a hill near the Sea of Galilee. A slight haze still covered the higher mountains, but the sea below lay in the golden sunshine. Judas looked about him. On the slopes the cedar woods lay like dark spots between the lighter green of the meadows and the vineyards. The land all about was alive with the murmur of many little streams. Near by was the white town of Capernaum. Eleazar pointed out the marble synagogue where the prophet of Nazareth had preached many times. On the green shores of the sea he had spoken to multitudes. Judas gazed out over the shore and the little hamlets. The fishermen were coming in from the lake after the work of the night, and their distant, faint song seemed a dreamy hymn to the dawn. This was the blessed land of the Galileans, those impetuous people whose language sounded impure and whose heathenish blood always prevailed, even though they were Jews.

Eleazar pointed to a large white house in the valley and said they would go there and ask hospitality of his friend, an Essene. "Many of his ideas might seem strange to you, Judas," he warned, as they descended the hill. "The Essenes know no cupidity, they don't want possessions for their benefit alone. They lead a pure life for they believe in the immortality of the soul. Many have let the Romans torture them to death. Yet they do not harbor hatred against them."

Great white lilies bloomed in the garden of the white house. A young man in a white tunic came toward them. Plucking two of the flowers, he offered them with a word of welcome and asked them to enter while he went to call his foster father.

An elderly man, slightly bent, came in. His eyes rested with interest on Judas as he greeted him. Then he turned to the happy smiling face of Eleazar. "At last, at last, Eleazar," he said, embracing him like a son. He invited them to sit at the table. "Let us break bread together and eat the fruit of God's garden. We cannot offer you wine or meat, only fruit, milk, honey, and bread, because the poorest in our village have them too."

Eleazar asked his friend to tell Judas of Jesus of Nazareth.

The Nazarene came to his house, the Essene said, and his own foster daughter, Brodhe, had gone with the women in his following. "He enters wherever he is welcome, into the houses of the faithful, and into those of sinners and publicans. He has even chosen a toll gatherer to follow him."

"A toll gatherer?" Judas exclaimed, horrified, and the despised image of Ismael rose before him.

"Already he has taught many a toll gatherer not to enrich himself dishonestly and not to live in too great luxury. He knows the lot of the poor. He said the taxes for the temple were too high, the quantity of wool and a seventh part of the fruit was too large a portion to take out of their small harvest. For King Herod and the Romans still demanded their part too. Those were his words."

Judas kept silent, ashamed of his brusque exclamation. Eleazar asked if following the prophet were not too strenuous for young Brodhe but the Essene said, "To those who follow the Nazarene all burdens seem light."

These words set Eleazar thinking. His burden always seemed heavy to him and no prophet took the weight from his shoulders. But as the Essene asked him how his relations with the Pharisees were at present, a cynical expression came over Eleazar's face. "Better than ever," he said. "For I flatter myself that now more than ever I see through them and their seven orders."

Hoping to bring him to a more reasonable judgment the Essene, who knew of Eleazar's difficulties with the Pharisees, listened patiently while Eleazar gave vent to his feelings in sarcastic words. "Should one not admire those Pharisees," he said, "who measure their belief in God according to the amount of gold they earn? And those who out of pure devotion hurl themselves against stone walls till they sink down with bleeding heads? What wisdom, indeed, for their brains contain not a single rational thought anyhow. I wish them success from the bottom of my heart. And then those who stare at their fellow-men from deep under their hoods like owls in the night. They evidently shun the light of God. A flower, a plant, a tree, everything in nature turns to the light in order to grow. But how great is the wisdom of the

Pharisees. They know that when the sun shines on a dunghill evil-smelling vapors come forth. That's why they fear the light of the sun. But more cunning still is that order of the Pharisees who don't obey the difficult commandments of the Lord, because then they cannot make an error for which the Lord could punish them."

"Eleazar, how dare you make judgments like this?" Judas said, indignant.

"Listen, Judas. The Pharisees did me the doubtful honor of asking me to wear their small mantle and their mules with the special straps. I refused. From my earliest year I have been educated by them. I slept on the narrow hard board, that instrument of torture, with stones and thorns under my body. I prayed for hours at a time without moving my hands, arms, or eyes—all according to the regulations. My eyes burned from lack of sleep. Then I discovered my teachers did not sleep on the hard board, nor did their children; their good deeds consisted of beautiful words and of artfully simulating a pure life. And their stories of prolonged fasting were lies as great as the eulogies on friendship with which they covered up their feelings of hatred."

"Don't you believe the Pharisees, too, are searching for wisdom and truth?" Judas asked, disturbed.

"Oh, yes," Eleazar said bitterly. "They indeed carry scripts of wisdom in phylacteries on their heads as if they would show to everyone that this wisdom is not inscribed in their souls."

"Is your judgment not too harsh, Eleazar?" the Essene asked calmly. "Within you is a strong fire, my son. With fire, beautiful and useful forms can be given to gold and other precious metals. But when the fire is too hot, precious metal melts and mixes with the ashes and that which is valuable is lost."

Uneasily Judas watched the angry expression in the eyes of his friend. "Do you really mean to say that the Pharisees have nothing good in them?" he asked.

"Not exactly. But to find it one must first expose their falsehoods. The Pharisees also form an obstacle to the liberation of our country. Their pride, their hatred and intrigues cause the Samaritans in the north, the Idumeans in the south, the Arab tribes over the Jordan, and even the Greeks to be hostile to us and therefore they are supporting the Romans against us."

"And the Sadducees, the Levites, are they good for nothing too?" Judas asked.

"The priests! They wade in the blood of the sacrificial animals and they diligently collect the shekels. But with what is their mind filled? With lust, power, self-interest, and worldly thoughts. Even the most glorious Messiah cannot teach them anything. They don't believe in the new manna that must be gathered. They don't see that without pure water flowing in, the clearest pond becomes muddy."

The Essene, seeing Judas so upset by Eleazar's violent words, brought the conversation back to the prophet of Nazareth. The Nazarene did not want to see the altars streaming with blood, he believed, nor would he ever raise the sword for the liberation. His mind was as lofty as the snowy top of Mount Hermon, now visible in all its splendor through the open window. "As a boy," the Essene said, "I went to Jerusalem to become a priest in the temple. It was near the Passover and the sacrifices had begun. I saw the blood streaming over the altars hour after hour, the whole day long, gurgling away in the channels, reddening the marble floors, the steps, the walls. The garments and the hands of the priests were dripping with blood. And all this to honor the Almighty. Even the innocent lamb, born in the temple, was sacrificed. I faltered and became an adherent of the sect of the Essenes. We believe all religious orders in their own way are seeking the truth of God. Even you, Eleazar, must acknowledge that the way the Pharisees oppose luxury and overrefinement has its good side."

"And the scribes, Eleazar, do you believe in their wisdom?" Judas asked in a tense voice.

Eleazar answered that he had put questions to many of them, and had carefully written down their answers, which differed as much as black and white. When he had asked them all for an explanation they had called him a devil. Eleazar smiled at the recollection. He seemed to be more composed now. "I do not hunt for riches or popularity," he said. "The people must be liberated, however, and if I cannot fulfil this task the Lord will call up others. For Israel will be victorious. One day maybe Eleazar the zealot will end up in the arena in front of the wild beasts to the satisfaction of his friends the Pharisees."

Judas, much perturbed, had listened to this stream of bitter words with his eyes anxiously fixed on Eleazar's tense face. He was worried about his friend whose life was without peace.

They finished the meal in silence, and as the Essene showed them out he asked them to convey his good wishes to Brodhe. Through the fields in bloom Judas and Eleazar went silently up the hill. From the top they looked back at the house in the peaceful garden with the white lilies.

"Roving zealots," Eleazar said reflectively, "do not deserve the peace the Lord gives to his sons. They only disturb it by their rebelliousness."

Judas was silent. He had come to the same conclusion.

As they traveled through the land, cool with the dew of morning or blazing in the sun, Eleazar spoke to Judas of the role of the mighty in the land. In Kerioth, talking to his father or Arisio, Judas had often discussed the rule of the

Herodian dynasty and the role of the priests. But politics, poisonous intrigues, and personal cunning had been unknown to Judas in Kerioth. From Arisio he had learned the story of Herod the Great, a depraved ruler, but one who nevertheless had striven to retain the throne of Israel for his eldest son Archelaus. Archelaus, after the Romans forced him to abuse his people and even to defile the temple, was banished to a land far to the north. In this way the kingdom of Judea, like a miserable province, was annexed to the Roman Empire. Even Jerusalem, the city where God had ordered Solomon to build his temple, was divested of its significance. That was why the residence of the Procurator was moved to Caesarea and why the Jewish delegates were often met with insolence. Only the high priest, residing in the palace of Herod, retained his power.

From Eleazar Judas heard that in reality this power reached only as far as the sly intrigues and shrewd adaptibility of the high priest could extend it. He was indeed allowed to speak about the times when the Lord reigned, almighty and divine, through the sons of Aaron. But never could he allude to the reinstatement of the old glory of the people of God. The high priest, forced to remain friends with the Romans, had to steer a middle course. And only the intriguers remained with him in the temple. The word of God as it was preached now was like wine that had become flat, bread gone stale, or withered fruit. That was why so many people indulged in all kinds of new philosophies. To earnest young Jews the only possibility left in Israel was to sacrifice themselves. Only those who were greedy and without scruples could maintain themselves. Therefore more and more Jews tried to become citizens of the Roman Empire rather than remain a mere Jew in the subjugated province of Judea. Those who accepted this humiliating condition, like some of the nobles who nurtured the illusion of being mighty in a humbled Judea, received a miserable reward for their machinations. For Judea, annexed by the Romans to the despised land of Samaria, was falling more and more into the background. Even Annas, the former high priest, first the friend of the Romans, ultimately became their henchman and puppet.

The Romans had continually reinforced their military strength. The Praetorium, the tower of Antonia, the walls and fortifications of Jerusalem and even the approaches to the temple were swarming with soldiers. The laws of jurisdiction were tightened and the tax collectors had cohorts at their disposal. The Roman justices were told not to hesitate to use their right to condemn to death. The vexations increased and feelings of resistance were artificially stirred up in the exhausted people in order to have a pretext for reprisals. It was the eternal story of the conqueror suppressing a subjugated people.

"At the receptions of the Procurator," Eleazar said bitterly, "all conciliatory spirit has disappeared. The delegates of the Jewish people and the priests are received in the midst of glittering swords and cuirasses as if they were conquered enemies. But it is through the fault of the depraved race of Herod, who do not uphold justice, that Israel has fallen so low."

While Judas listened his face became more somber. "Israel is cast down, powerless, because the Almighty is no longer with us," he burst out. "He has taken the glory of Israel in his hand and smashed it to earth. Our people are like an abandoned woman, no longer respected. The Lord has turned his face away from us. But has he not always shown mercy to those who sought him? Therefore we have no right to fear the darkness; it is our duty to seek the light. And if God sends the Messiah, he will come not to destroy but to build anew and to liberate us from the yoke."

Eleazar looked thoughtfully at Judas. He who, with his hand on his dagger, dealt daily with spies and outlaws and sometimes even with robbers of the highways, almost envied Judas for his firm conviction that it was the Messiah who would liberate Israel.

Lost in their own thoughts they continued their way along the seashore. They had heard that Jesus of Nazareth was expected in a near-by village and that he would preach there.

Judas looked along the road. In the distance coming toward him was a boy leading a little donkey on which a gray-haired woman rode. "Have you seen the rabbi of Nazareth who preaches to the crowd?" Judas asked.

The boy looked at the old woman and she said kindly, "We have heard of him, but we have not seen him." They smiled and went on.

Again and again Judas asked people on the road if they had seen the rabbi of Nazareth, but nobody could tell him where he was. A rich Samaritan on a jet-black horse passed by followed by a retinue of mounted attendants. To his question, Judas got only a hard "no" in answer. The mighty man dug his spurs into the horse's flanks as if he wanted to show his disdain.

Then a fisherman approached carrying his net. It seemed to Judas that all his heavy burdens fell from him as he heard the words, "You mean the Nazarene, I suppose. You may call yourself happy. On the other side of the hill here, you will see a big house in a garden full of flowers. There he has spent the night. He is still there with his disciples. He heals the sick for nothing, poor and rich. They say he heals the soul as well as the body, and I believe it, for he has wondrous eyes. Knock on the door without hesitation. You will be well received. Peace be with you."

Over the hill they came to a pleasant valley. The village was near-by and they saw at once the big house in the bright light of the morning, its white walls covered with red ramblers, surrounded by a garden with oleanders in bloom and majestic royal palms.

Before going to the house they went to a little brook and sat down in the shade. They wanted to rest and purify their thoughts. As they refreshed themselves in the brook, Judas felt that what was going to happen now would decide his life. He had come to follow the prophet. Yet he was uncertain whether he would be chosen. But after a while his hesitancy disappeared, and followed by Eleazar he went to the house.

"Come in without fear," a servant said, "you surely come to the prophet of Nazareth."

Eleazar hesitated. He felt he could not go in to the Nazarene, he who did not believe in a miraculous liberation by a heavenly deliverer. His way was not the same as that of Judas. "Go in, Judas, go alone. There is something that keeps me from going with you. I cannot."

Judas nodded. Going forward as in a dream, he entered the hall. He saw Jesus of Nazareth clad in a crimson mantle seated at a long table. Several men were near him—probably his faithful disciples.

Judas felt no hesitation. When he entered the hall it was as if he had come from darkness into light. His eyes fixed on Jesus, he walked toward him. It was as if his feet were not touching the floor, and at every step the light became more radiant. Jesus of Nazareth was watching him. And Judas knew that he had fathomed his soul. For the first time he felt the light penetrating him—the light like the word that was spoken and the word that was heard and understood.

Judas, who had kept his head slightly bent like one who cannot bear the full rays of the sun, raised it now. Jesus had risen slowly and now took a step toward Judas. Judas knew that his whole life he had hungered and thirsted, that now he was approaching the source that would quench his thirst and the bread that would feed him. He knew that he had found the fountain of life and love. He need not say who he was and whence he came. As in a dream he heard his own voice humbly saying, "I have come, Master."

The Nazarene, who from afar had called him, nodded. He knew that Judas had left his home to find him. As Judas felt the embrace of the prophet he saw in his face love and strength conquering even without words. Then he stammered, "Your goodness is great, Master."

The Nazarene smiled and turned to the disciples, and thus all understood that Judas had come to fulfil his task. With a friendly gesture Jesus invited him to sit at the table.

The host had taken from the hands of a servant a platter with charoseth made of dates, figs, and grapes, and he offered it to Judas. Jesus broke the bread and gave a piece to him.

Judas saw an aureole of gold about the head of the prophet and the bread seemed radiant with light. As he put it into his mouth it was as if the light was within him. Judas felt that this man had appeased his hunger, the hunger that had driven him along difficult paths. Slowly he ate, for this bread was a costly treasure that he must not squander. He did not touch the fragrant charoseth offered him by the host.

When the head of the house heard that Jesus was going to preach in the synagogue and would not return to his roof, he asked Philip whether he could offer a riding animal for his long journeys. But Philip answered, "My Master prefers to go God's way on foot instead of riding on an animal. On foot he will speak the word of God. Give the animal to the poor."

Jesus rose to go to the small synagogue and his disciples followed him. Among them was Judas Iscariot. It happened after the last words of Jesus had been spoken that one of them made this request of the Master; "Master, teach us to pray as John taught his disciples."

Jesus answered "When you pray say, Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed by thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done. . . ."

As Judas listened to these words, his whole being was penetrated by a feeling of bliss. But suddenly a strange thought came to him. Why did not the Master pray that his own kingdom come, his own will be done? Had he not come to bring to the sons of Israel the kingdom, of which he himself would be king.

This thought was like a black fountain springing up within Judas, for he felt baffled and held back from the understanding he so longed for.

9

In the first days after he had become a disciple of the Master, Judas felt a remarkable transformation taking place within him. It was as if his strong body was becoming lighter, as if he had been penetrated by a force that gave his mind a steady domination over his body. He felt protected from all violence, from all those who nourished evil in their hearts. Often as he had listened to Eleazar there seemed to be hidden snares everywhere. He continually felt it his duty to take up arms. The whole thinking of his friend had been directed toward meeting violence with violence. Talking with Eleazar, he too became exalted at thoughts of the Lord's sending his hosts on earth to deliver the Jewish people. Then he could see why bands of zealous men waited so tensely for the day of action.

All these turbulent thoughts had left him. The influence of Jesus was like the light that dispels the darkness. Judas lived in an atmosphere of purity and holiness as in a temple, where the golden voice of the Master resounded, teaching the word of God. In a miraculous way he dispelled all fear and anxiety, giving strength and peace. When Judas saw the hand of the Master raised in blessing he knew it to be a perfect instrument of God destined to deliver all men from oppressions and fears. And sometimes he thought that it might well be the hand of God himself.

At that time Judas had a wondrous dream. He was standing on a high mountain with the Master, who pointed to two heaps of stones: one of white marble blocks neatly piled, the other of poisonous green, purple, and yellow boulders. When the Master asked him what he would do with these stones Judas did not hesitate. With the marble blocks he would build the most splendid white temple on the whole earth, whereupon the Master told him to start at once. As he lifted up the first block it was as light as a feather, for on all sides angels helped him carry the heavy burden. When he had put this block carefully in place the Master told him to look up and he saw before his eyes a luminous temple so high that it reached the sky and so large that it covered the earth. The Master disappeared, but the white temple was still there and he knew it would be there to all eternity. When he awoke this image was clear in his mind and the whole day he carried it within him like a costly treasure.

That morning at breakfast Jesus broke the bread and passed it to the disciples. Judas, seated at the end of the table near Simon Peter, told him his glorious dream. He thought he saw the Master looking at him as if he understood him, yet he could not have heard his words. Timidly he said to Peter, "It is as if our Master fathoms our secret thoughts. He understands our words from afar, even our unspoken words. If he wants to lead us on the road to eternity I will follow him, wherever he goes. And I will hate all those who hate him."

But Simon Peter asked, "How could our Master lead you on the road to the truth and the light if you, as you say, would hate instead of love and forgive. How could you sing the praise of God, when your tongue sticks to your palate, paralyzed by hatred? Only when you desire the good and fulfil it with love will righteousness be about you."

"Simon Peter, I will try to be a faithful servant of our Master," Judas promised solemnly.

Simon Peter put his hand on the shoulder of the young disciple and said, "You will often go astray, yet you will become like the tree growing to heaven and the cornerstone hewn for the temple of God."

Judas, together with the other disciples, stood listening to the Master's words as he spoke to the fishermen, the vintagers, and those who lived in the towns and villages and had come from afar. They should not be anxious about their life, what they should eat and drink, nor for what they should put on the body, he told them. For life was more than food and the body more than clothing. They should look at the birds of the air who neither sow nor reap, nor gather into barns, and yet God feeds them. Were they not of more value than the birds? They should consider the lilies of the field; they neither toil nor spin, yet even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of them.

At these words Judas involuntarily shook his head. He felt a hand on his arm, and Philip whispered in his ear, "Do you know, Judas, that you are showing disagreement with the Master before the multitude? You should realize that these people came from all over to hear the Master's words." Then, as if the Master knew of his dissent, Judas heard him saying they should not doubt. Rather they should seek the kingdom of God and all these things would be theirs as well. They should sell what they have, and give alms; provide themselves with a bag that never grows old, a treasure that never fails. No thief could steal this treasure in heaven, nor could moths consume it. For where the treasure is there is the heart also.

It was on this day, after these words, that Jesus entrusted Judas with the stewardship of the little money they owned in common. Judas accepted this task with humility, but without real joy, because the words Jesus had spoken caused him great anxiety. For now he knew that he was to serve the Master, and he would be a faithful servant. He knew what was required and he would be ready to do the will of his lord. But his very desire to carry this out in good faith caused a confusion in his mind and, thinking about it, he saw a contradiction between the lofty words of the Master and the material worries of daily life. He racked his brain trying to find an explanation.

Then there was the other story about the dresser of a vineyard who, according to his master's wish, had planted a fig tree. In three years his master came looking for fruit on it, and finding none told the dresser to cut it down because it cluttered up the ground. That master, Judas considered, was surely right in demanding that fruit be gathered from his fig tree. Even so he, Judas, should continually think about gathering money for his purse, for how, otherwise, could he feed all of them? Even if he himself had a golden treasure in heaven, how could he always give alms if he did not attend to the money? Would they themselves not be like the grass of which the Master had spoken, which today grows in the field and tomorrow is cast into the fire? Without Judas' own severity would there not be grinding poverty for them all? Was it really wrong to desire goods and property? And was money cursed because so many rich squandered it or wouldn't give it to the poor? Was luxury an evil? Was it a sin that the pearl-fishers dived into the depths of the sea for pearls and that the merchants sold them? Did money not bring relief when one was sick and living in a lightless house?

One could desire the blessedness of the kingdom of heaven without disdaining earthly goods as the Master did. The

Master had a lofty soul, and pure were all his words and deeds, but why must his steward always be worrying about the scarce money that would hardly last until the morrow? Oh, yes, the Master had said that the kingdom of heaven was near, that all distress would come to an end. He healed the sick and he delivered others from their sins. But was he not like an innocent child, who does not know the power and value of earthly goods? Even if you are a saint, was it necessary to be poor, and always to have to ask for water for your feet, for a resting place and food? If the Master were rich, the scribes too would react in another way. Then the Master could satisfy not only the hunger of the soul, but of the poor. When Judas started to speak about the small amount of money in their purse, the Master always turned away. When the rich wanted to present money or other things, Jesus sometimes refused it. Judas saw a complete contradiction between the words of his Master and his deeds. Had not the Master said clearly that he who wants to build a tower should first sit down and calculate if he really has what is necessary to complete it? But when Judas calculated and went to the Master, his pitiful funds in hand, the Master only smiled. He did not want to hear about their expenses. Judas could not build the foundations of a tower if he did not have the stones to complete it, could he? The Master also spoke of kings who before going to war must earnestly take counsel among themselves, to decide whether they had enough warriors at their disposal for the battle. Why didn't Judas also have the right to sit down and calculate? Good bread could not be bought without money, nor could fruit. Worries began to prevail in Judas' mind and in his soul, worries about the small things of daily life.

One day the Master told the parable of the unfaithful steward who was accused by his rich master of wasting his goods. The steward, knowing that the stewardship would be taken away from him, and being ashamed to beg, called his master's debtors to him and asked them how much they owed his lord. As they said a hundred measures of oil or of wheat, the unjust man told them to sit down and cut their bills in half. Thus he knew that, if he were put out of the stewardship, they would receive him into their houses, for he had made himself a friend of the mammon of unrighteousness, and he had been prudent. This unfaithful steward was commended by his lord, because he had done wisely, Judas reflected. He felt resistance rise in himself. He, a faithful steward, could not understand the unjust being praised. He surely would not serve unrighteous mammon, but without gold, neither towers nor kingdoms could be built, not even by the children of light. Was one not also a child of this world, and were not material needs relentless?

Thus a great anxiety came into the heart of the faithful steward Judas, for he could not understand what his Master had meant in speaking of unrighteous mammon. Even Simon Peter had not grasped the meaning of it, but he, at least, had understood that the Master did not praise the wickedness of the unjust.

Judas, who had always been a lover of nature, often reflected upon God's creation. The Master had spoken of the birds that do not sow and have neither storehouse nor barn. But the birds had wings and could fly everywhere. When the winter came with snow on the high mountains, they flew to sunny valleys or to warmer regions. The animals, though, that had to stay in their nests or holes, worked and toiled to fill up their storehouses, like the little field mouse and the squirrel, the bees and the ants. And if all the honey was taken from the combs, the bees died. The birds that did not sow or reap still built nests so they could guard the eggs in storms, protect the young from danger and provide food for them. To every creature in the animal kingdom God had given the ability to gather food, and they toiled at their task from sunrise till dark. Was it right to make a comparison by saying that God feeds them, and how much better were men than birds? And what about the lilies? A single rainstorm could destroy this raiment more glorious than that of Solomon. Why shouldn't one ask what there is to eat and drink? In order to give alms one must possess something to give. The thoughts of the Master were lofty and his voice was clear and sounded beautiful, but sometimes the words of the Master were vague, it seemed to Judas. He could not grasp their meaning. And he began to think that the Master was often in error. Was he not seeing as a reality that which was only a mirage?

Many days passed. They had come to the Sea of Galilee. Judas, all by himself, went to a far-off hamlet to buy simple food for the group. Just before nightfall he returned. His purchases had been small but his burden was heavy. There was little money left. In spite of the heat during the day he had not allowed himself to eat or drink in order to save the few pennies. On the road he met a great crowd coming back from the mountain. The people were talking excitedly about miracles they had seen. When Judas asked them what had happened they told him that they had come from Capernaum, Tiberias, and all the villages on the shores of the lake, and that they had gone up the mountain to a meadow where the prophet of Nazareth was resting with his disciples.

"We saw the things he did for the sick," one of them told Judas. "Then I heard one of the disciples say to the prophet that the country round about was like a desert, arid and full of stones, and that he should send away the people so they could get food in the hamlets farther on. But the prophet said that the people need not leave, that the disciples should give them something to eat. One of the disciples answered that for two hundred pennies not enough bread could be bought for everyone. At that moment a young lad passed by who had five loaves and two fishes in a basket. The prophet told them to bring them to him. He took the loaves and the fish and blessed them. Then he broke them and gave the pieces to the disciples, and they gave them to us. Then a miracle happened, for every one of us got his share and was filled, and the leftovers were gathered and filled twelve baskets. Then," the man said, "we all understood that he should be king, because he truly is the prophet who was to come."

Judas asked if they had spoken to him. They said no, for Jesus had gone up the barren mountain and left them behind in the meadow.

After hearing this astonishing story Judas hurried on and found the disciples greatly excited. They crowded around him and told him that the Master had fed five thousand men besides the women and children. They said it was a greater miracle than the manna their fathers had eaten in the wilderness. For the Master had given them earthly bread and yet it was the bread of heaven.

Judas, tired but standing tall and strong, asked them if they really were satiated with these miraculous loaves. There was a note of protest in his voice as he said, "So I didn't need to walk in the heat in search of bread."

"They believed in the bread of heaven the Master gave them," John said.

"They believe in earthly bread, too," Judas said sharply, "the bread that is bought with money." The others kept silent. With a hard, rebellious voice Judas spoke again, "If the Master performs such miracles, could he not change granite into gold? Gold is also of God and on earth it is almighty."

Then Simon said, "Judas Iscariot, do not forget that one of us is a Satan. . . ."

Judas, lifting his mighty head, looked into the face of Peter, who was gazing at him unwaveringly. "I do not understand. . . ."

"No, Judas, you do not understand the words of our Master: 'I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall never hunger; and he who believes in me shall never thirst.' "

Then Judas knew that he was hungering and thirsting for something other than what the Master was speaking of. He was longing for a pure, true reality, for a foundation on which a temple could be built, for something mighty that would have power over all unrighteousness, against all evil, against all malice. And in his mind he saw on earth a mighty temple, not built of words and miracles, but of white marble, built with great zeal, toil, and sweat, to honor God and the Master, a temple of glory here on earth.

Before long the story of the miracle of the loaves and fish was known all around the Sea of Galilee. The multitude who followed the prophet on foot and in boats grew every day. The people no longer shunned the dust of the roads in the midday sun, no distance was too great, no weariness too much. Young women adorned with wreaths of flowers came to meet Jesus, singing: "He is like the sun making all things grow, he is like the rain, the blessing of the earth; he brings us peace and joy of heart." When the multitude discovered the white figure of Jesus striding through the sunlit meadow they began acclaiming him, "Hosanna, hosanna, blessed be he, the son of David!" They knelt in the dust before him and kissed the hem of his robe.

Then Judas' heart was filled with joy, for he felt the Master was the only one in whom the people still believed. He could arouse them and stir them to deeds. He would throw off the yoke of the Romans and set bounds to the power of the Jewish oppressors. But the mighty action should be carefully devised. The day would come when the mountains of Galilee and the towns about the sea would be liberated and Jerusalem would again become the Holy City. Judas was aroused from his reverie by Simon Peter's saying that the Master was going to Jerusalem.

"Not to the temple?" Judas asked.

Peter shook his head. They had to go away from here. The multitude was growing too large and restless, and their expectations should not be raised too high. With a touch of dissent in his voice Judas asked why then they had to go to Jerusalem if the people here were so faithful to the Master? Peter smiled and said that the wind blew where it pleased and when one heard its voice one could not tell whence it came and whither it went. So it was with everyone who was born of the spirit. The Master went wherever he could awake men to a new life. Now he was going to Jerusalem to the Pool of Bethesda near the sheepgate, where many sick people came to be healed in the water.

On the way to Jerusalem the disciples were apprehensive. The wicked were out to destroy the Master. Everywhere they told people that he broke the sabbath and that, by saying God was his Father, he made himself equal with God. Jesus' answer to them was that the Father had granted him the works which he accomplished. As the Father raised up the dead so the Son quickened whom he would. For he had come in the name of the Father.

10

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives, where he prayed and rested. The scribes, forewarned, were awaiting him with impatience in the temple. They had brought their writings and intended to confuse him with wily questions. They rightly feared his all-embracing knowledge and could not understand how or where this Nazarene had acquired it. This time they waited in vain.

Early this bright spring morning Jesus made his way to the sheepgate followed by the disciples in their simple garments striding heavily in their coarse footgear. It struck Judas what a great difference there was between the Master and his followers. The Master's sublime confidence in himself as one sent by the Father to bring consolation to the destitute and the sick gave him a truly radiant appearance. His step was light and the light of love was within him. Everyone who was not blind could see that.

As they approached the Pool of Bethesda they saw a great crowd of sick people, blind and crippled and withered with old age. They were all waiting for the moving of the water. They believed that sometimes an angel troubled the water, and whoever stepped in first was healed of whatever disease he had. If the Master had been the angel they were waiting for, Judas thought, the crowd could not have been more deeply moved.

Jesus went among the sick and with him went Judas Iscariot. Even before Jesus had spoken a word, Judas recognized Thaddeus among the sick. Thaddeus saw Judas and haltingly called his name. He had come to the pool, he said, because Arisio told him that miracles happened there and the sick were healed.

Jesus beckoned Judas to take his friend to the pool and submerge him. Judas did as his Master wished without any fear of Thaddeus' leprosy. "It is good that you have come, Thaddeus," he said kindly. "Our Master will heal you. The days in your dark cave are past forever."

Jesus went down to the pool, took a little water, and cleansed the sick man. Seeing that Thaddeus was the first to be chosen, the others were glad. Earlier, when the water had moved they had seen Thaddeus yield his place to a child who was healed.

Thaddeus became healthy again, and, later Judas heard from his father that Thaddeus had gone into the service of a vintager and worked in the light of the garden, and that the vines he took care of grew like no other plants and yielded fruit in abundance.

The following morning Jesus went to the temple with his disciples. The scribes, the Pharisees and many others would be impatiently waiting for him, Judas thought, for he had heard they planned to humiliate him.

More strongly than ever Judas was impressed by the mighty buildings of Jerusalem, the palaces and fortifications and the lofty eagle in front of the Praetorium to which a humble salute must be made by everyone who passed. But in this mighty city, stronghold of the Romans, seat of the

Jewish priesthood, only a few simple men believed in the Master and they were cautious in showing it.

As Jesus and his followers passed the first terrace of the temple, one of the Pharisees approached saying he was happy he could ask him for advice, because he had heard Jesus was a friend of sinful women.

Standing behind the Master, Judas saw the enemy peering at Jesus searching for a vulnerable spot. But the Master was smiling and as self-possessed as a warrior who pits himself against his adversary in an apparently playful way although he knows he is engaged in mortal combat. In a few moments Jesus was surrounded by Pharisees and scribes. Judas saw how belligerent they were. Had they not come, these men, hissing like snakes after a long-coveted prey? Even before a word was spoken they began the fight, and this time they seemed to be certain of victory. Judas felt they should be punished.

One of them said sarcastically, "Master, we ask a judgment of you, which will be obeyed because of your great wisdom, especially because you are so attentive to sinful women." They grinned, enjoying their triumph beforehand.

Judas saw the baseness in their eyes and in spite of himself he clenched his fists. Then he saw that the Master was unembarrassed, free from hatred or fear.

At this moment some servants of the Pharisees approached dragging along a young woman. Her tousled hair fell around her and tears trickled down her cheeks. At a sign from the Pharisee who was the spokesman the servants threw her rudely down.

Arrogantly the Pharisee said to Jesus, "This woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. We know that you honor the law of Moses, which demands that such be stoned."

Jesus was silent. His eyes were fixed with compassion on the young woman.

"We come to you, Master," the Pharisee's voice sounded like an insult, "to hear the words which will determine her lot."

Jesus was still silent. Judas saw that the sinner despite her terror was beautiful. What could the Master answer now? Judas looked intently at the Pharisee, whose sallow wrinkled face testified to many sins. If the Master defends her, Judas thought, will God support him? His adversaries will rightfully accuse him of violating the law.

"What do you say?" cried an old scribe impatiently.

The Master still did not answer. His gaze remained fixed on the woman who dared not raise her eyes. He stooped down and with his finger wrote on the ground, letter after letter. His letters formed words, fiery words. He lifted up his face and looked around. His eyes sought the eyes of his enemies, quietly, as if he looked deep within them. He seemed to ask: "What do you say?"

The Pharisees and scribes looked at the words shrugging their shoulders. But Judas saw the letters clearly visible in the sunlight, luminous like magic characters. Still the Master did not speak. The bitterness in the circle about him increased. A coarse fellow with a hard hateful face, declared he could read not a syllable. Judas, seeing his obesity and sensual expression thought he surely had indulged and sinned more than the young woman at his feet. If this man dared to stone, he would be stoned in turn. And Judas clenched his fist as if he held a stone in it already.

The arrogant voice of the Pharisee said still more threateningly, "What do you say?"

Then the Master said in a clear voice heard through the temple, that he who was without sin among them should cast the first stone at her. And bending down Jesus again wrote on the ground.

They looked around in fear of the power of the Master's answer. Because he with his wondrous eyes had searched them all, they suddenly feared he knew their sins and would inscribe them here, in the temple.

Still the slender forefinger was writing on the ground. As the Master raised his head he saw only a few waverers. The old men had wandered off first and the younger ones had followed. Now those who hesitated turned away and left.

Then the Master bent down to the young woman and raising her up asked where her accusers were. Had no man condemned her?

"No man, Lord," the woman said fearfully.

Jesus said neither did he condemn her. She should sin no more. With that, the young woman left.

After the Master and the disciples had left the temple, Simon Peter saw Judas sitting on a stone by the road, his head in his hands. Touching his shoulder Peter asked, "What is troubling you, Judas?"

The blood rushed to Judas' face, for at the moment he was thinking of the young sinner, of his violent anger and his impulse to punish her torturers, of the Pharisee with his vicious face, and of the bad judge. Looking up at Peter he said, "If the Pharisee had thrown a stone at that young woman I would have struck him down. And I would have become a murderer before I realized it myself."

Peter shook his head. "Why, Judas, why? Do you believe these false judges would have executed their sentence in the presence of our Master? They are merely rich hypocrites who keep the Passover and make burnt offerings while they transgress the law all the time. It was their unrighteousness that made them hesitate and flee like hares. But what did you do, Judas? You forgot there are still good judges and faithful scribes who do not wish to destroy truth and mercy. You looked only at the dry places of the desert, and you did not understand that the wild beasts of the night protect their nests from generation to generation. Our Master wishes roses to bloom there and the wicked to become gardeners who believe in the fountains that water the arid land and the thirsty soul. You, who are a disciple of our Master, would not have opened blind eyes to the light, nor would you have made deaf ears hear. You would have stoned. And instead of pure water in the dry desert your stone would have caused a fountain of blood and unrighteousness to surge up. Are you any better than these men, Judas?"

These words touched Judas deeply, and as he went on his way to make his daily purchases he heard again and again Peter's admonishing voice. In the market place all the people were talking about the young adulteress and the Master. This Jesus of Nazareth and his disciples were dangerous, they said. To his horror Judas heard them say that the Nazarene would destroy the altars; he was unfaithful to the law, for he defended the sinful woman who had broken the marriage laws. In his wickedness he tried to injure the honor of peaceful citizens and drove the righteous away.

Judas quickly bought the things he needed without haggling, as usual, for every copper coin and went away deeply shocked by what he had heard. When he came back from the market place none of the disciples were there. He sat down at the table in the light of an oil lamp and neatly ranged his coins on the table. He felt guilty because he had not beaten down the prices asked by the greedy merchants. Dejectedly he counted again and again. John came in and sat down without a word. Judas greeted him perfunctorily and took no further notice of him.

John smiled and said kindly, "Truly Judas, if the Master saw you he could tell a beautiful parable of the faithful keeper of the purse. But many a faithful steward sometimes, without knowing it, trangresses the Seventh Commandment."

Judas, startled, looked up from his calculations. The

Seventh Commandment, he thought—"thou shalt not steal." "What do you mean, John?" In his confusion he set his purse down with a bang on the table. One of the coins fell out and rolled away over the smooth wood. John put his hand on it and gave it back to Judas.

"I did not want to disturb you, Judas, and make your task still more difficult. I mentioned the Seventh Commandment but not with respect to a few copper coins."

"What do you mean then? Are you afraid I would take the money for my own use?" Judas cast a confused look at John. "I don't understand you. You speak of stealing. You all think in such a strange way that I cannot follow you, neither the Master nor you."

John made a conciliatory gesture, but Judas withdrew. A feeling of utter discouragement fell over him. As if seeking support he looked outside and saw the Master absorbed in thought, near the lilies in bloom, his white garment and the flowers radiant with the gold of the sunset. There was his recourse, Judas thought. "John," he said, "let us go to the Master and ask him about your strange words."

But John replied, "Let us not disturb the Master in his meditation. It is only a misunderstanding, Judas. We all know you are a faithful steward and that you love the truth. But when I saw you so concerned with the worthless treasure in your cowhide purse, over which you rightly watch, I was worried. I saw you cast down for the sake of insignificant values. I feared you might be lacking in your real duties: charity in giving alms and true mercy that comes from the heart. Wholly absorbed in managing their money even the most faithful can, without realizing it, become thieves of the treasures of the Lord. But in my zeal I have become guilty myself, for I have unwittingly hurt you."

Judas' face relaxed. Only now did he understand John's good intentions. Reassured he nodded happily as John said, "We all know that not a single coin is wasted by you, Judas. I only wanted to tell you that not merely must you take care of the copper coins, but also you should be the guardian of the true gold of the Lord." Pointing through the window to the garden suffused by the last rays of the sunset, John said, "See the Master beholding the lilies that are the symbol of true faith, whose garment is more glorious than that of King Solomon." But John did not know that he had again touched a sore spot in Judas.

Judas dwelt a long time on the words of John. The other disciples, John above all, understood more of the truth the Master taught than he with his violent nature. True, he was one of the disciples, yet he felt he would always be the last of the twelve.

The first time Judas saw Mary of Magdala in the following of the Master he was stirred by a deep emotion. It was early in the morning and she had come back from the bazaar followed by a man carrying her purchases. He felt a tightening of the throat as she approached in the shadow of the high palm trees between luxuriant gardens. Her graceful figure was wrapped in a purple robe falling in soft folds. She seemed incomparably beautiful to him. Although her hair was covered by a veil, some stray locks fell about her face. Her wide blue eyes were fixed on him. Her appearance was like a marvelous dream, and in her presence he felt utterly confused and speechless. It was as bewildering as the first time the most beautiful woman of Judea and Galilee had looked at him from her costly litter. He heard her voice, quiet and melodious and yet warm and intimate. It was as if he was entering a new world.

"You are one of the disciples of our Master and Judas is your name, isn't it?"

A wave of happiness swept through him. Uncertain of finding the right words he only nodded. With some hesitation he asked, "Do you remember when we saw each other before?"

"At the fountain of Julia," she said, her quiet gaze still fixed on him.

His voice trembled as he said, "I looked at you and I thought you saw me." He did not dare say that since then her image had hardly left his mind.

"I remember," she said softly, "but it seems so long ago. My life then was very different from what it is now."

"Have you found peace?" Judas asked, secretly hoping she was still confused. But Mary answered that the Master had taken away all restlessness and anxiety from her. Judas, seeing her flowering in beauty, knew that she was inaccessible to his coarser nature. While she was speaking her hands made little gestures to stress her words, hands that he knew were destined to alleviate pain and give in love. He wanted to tell her that hers surely would be a glorious task, but he could only utter a few halting words. As she bade him a gentle farewell and went into the garden with its multi-colored flowers, he remained standing in the middle of the road gazing after her in a kind of ecstasy.

In the following days Judas seldom talked to Mary, both being absorbed in their tasks. But he paid close attention to the attitude of the other disciples toward her, and noticed that the light of the Master had by no means dispersed all the shadows from their souls. Sometimes their eyes fixed sternly on Mary, especially when they thought she stayed too long near the Master. Simon Peter, a simple man, questioned her inner purity. He had never known a sinful woman to strive after a true cleansing of soul.

Judas' thoughts, on the contrary, were filled with Mary's beauty and her simple goodness. He discerned the disciples' antagonism and their scarcely concealed intention to exclude her. This attitude was amplified by the fact that they could not understand the charity of the Master toward her. When Mary greeted them she always showed a modest friendliness and, eager to oblige, she brought to them all without preference the water to wash their feet. For the sake of the Master alone did she carry out her tasks with complete devotion. This roused them, for they demanded greater humility of this woman. Yet Mary had become more and more the chosen one, and they considered this unjust. Only Judas was convinced that the Master in his all-embracing love wanted to protect Mary and uplift her, and cause her whole being to flourish again.

Matthew was the only one who made Judas happy. Having been a toll gatherer who had often handled counterfeit money, he said, he had seen the artifices and intrigues of men, and therefore he knew the difference between pure gold and copper.

"What do you mean?" Simon Peter asked in a hard voice.

"That the crown on Mary's head is of pure gold, and since the Master by his words and deeds has put it on her beautiful head it must be the crown of God. I, who was never without sin, know this to be true. Therefore peace be with her."

Judas rejoiced at these words. But suddenly he feared that the Master would lead Mary where he could no longer follow.

One day as the disciples were waiting for the Master, Mary was among them. One of them spoke of an adulterous woman who, having been stoned, lay dying. Hearing this, Mary said to Philip, "Unfortunate woman! First she was punished by her own sins and then, through the sins of others, she was kept from repenting. For who would believe their stones were guided by God for the sake of justice and mercy?"

One of them asked her what she would say of the sin of adultery. Although Mary felt this was a veiled attack on herself she answered in a trembling voice, "Everybody must beware of judging others too harshly." And with dignity she rose and went away.

"And what do you say, Judas Iscariot?" Simon Peter asked petulantly. "You, a young and ardent man, will surely understand this better than we do."

Judas asked what Peter meant. If he thought Mary had led a sinful life he should try to make her burden lighter. What made him angry with her regained purity? Did he want to call back the devils the Master had driven out? Peter cast down his eyes reflecting on his answer, but Judas demanded: "Answer me."

Before Peter could say a word Andrew came up to Judas. His face, brown as leather, was now pale with anger.

"Don't speak so boldly, Judas. You are always staring at her as a snake watches a dove. A passion is burning in you and you hope she will not resist you. You desire her for yourself alone."

"How dare you say that?" Judas exclaimed.

Andrew withdrew muttering, "She acts like a queen. She should be glad we tolerate her among us."

"Here comes the Master," Philip said with relief.

As Jesus approached, his gaze glided over the group. All violence had suddenly disappeared. And as if his coming had already allayed the storm, the heads were bent. Only Judas looked up at him, for he did not want to miss one word the Master would say.

The voice of the Master was stern as he asked if they still did not know that the light transcends the darkness, and that the desire to extinguish the light was sin. He warned them that followers should be faithful not in words alone, but also in deeds. They were to leave the pure in peace and not look for sins that had been long since forgiven.

Long afterwards Judas reflected that these followers, who thought themselves so much better than he, had no purity in their thoughts nor had they mercy and peace in their souls. He alone saw the purity in Mary, and his feelings for her came from a pure source. And Andrew had said he was like a snake staring at a dove!

That night he had a troubled sleep. In his dream he saw Mary weeping at the injustice done. Wanting to console her, he took her in his arms and embraced her tenderly.

Early the following morning he saw Mary followed again by the porter. He envied the man, for he would gladly have carried her burdens. Her head was bent as if she were lost in thought. There was something queenly about her. Suddenly he understood why the followers were opposed to her. She *was* the queen, the uncrowned queen in the kingdom of the Master. And in his imagination he saw Jesus putting a crown on her head for eternity. He wanted to acclaim her, but he could not. He would even prevent the Master from crowning her. And he saw himself, like Simon Peter, in the camp of her adversaries.

11

One day when Judas was in the bazaar in Bethsaida, he suddenly saw Eleazar. Happy to see each other again after many months, Eleazar and Judas walked together under the sycomores, talking.

"I came in the following of Jesus," Judas said. "We are here for a short time. My Master has many followers in Bethsaida and many others are waiting for him. He heals their sickness and brings them peace."

"I am here for quite another reason," Eleazar said. And with a twinkle in his eyes he added, "Remember the incident with the gladiator, Judas?"

Judas nodded. "He didn't mean any harm," he said good-naturedly. "What can one expect of these poor brutes of the arena? They have to kill to stay alive."

"Great games with famous gladiators will be held here soon," Eleazar said. "Up till now I have always carefully avoided the arena, but I decided to go this time."

"How can you do a thing like that, Eleazar?" Judas exclaimed, astonished. "I thought you had an aversion to these useless bloody battles."

"I do," Eleazar said, "but lately I have come to the conclusion that the resistance organized merely with honest people in small occupations, trade, or business, will never be strong enough to gain a victory. Recently a friend of the resistance, an Arab, visited the famous fights in the arena of Alexandria. He told me we should seek the collaboration of the trained fighters of the subjugated peoples."

"But they are a murderous lot, your trained fighters," Judas exclaimed.

"They are fierce warriors," Eleazar said. "My friend has seen them. There are gigantic blue-eyed Goths with honey-colored hair and thick-set figures from the banks of the Danube, Gauls, Samnites and Thracians, and even prisoners from the isles of the Britons who are brought into the arena in cages because the Romans are afraid to give them swords outside it. My friend convinced me that we might find supporters for our cause among them. Perhaps we can find a lanista, a trainer, who can teach our young men the art of swordmanship. But look who comes there," he said pointing to the gigantic figure of Romelo approaching the fortuneteller, seated at his usual spot.

With his habitual glibness of tongue the fortuneteller called out to greet the giant, "Romelo, the greatest gladiator of all times, comes to me to have his fortune unveiled."

"No," Romelo said. "Only to have you write a letter to the senior centurions and the commanders of the cohorts at Bethsaida." Carelessly he threw a large silver coin to the fortuneteller even though the man said he would be glad to help him free of charge.

"Write," Romelo ordered. And with great emphasis he dictated a letter to all the commanders and soldiers of the Roman legion challenging any one of them to a fight in the ordinary armor of the legion in the arena of Bethsaida to commemorate his fiftieth combat.

"Would it not be wise to add: 'in honest combat'?" the fortuneteller said. "For that is the only thing the Romans do not seek." And he sighed deeply.

"It is the fight for my liberty, you know," the giant said. "The Procurator, my master, has promised to set me free if in my fiftieth combat I come out a victor. He has the charter of liberty ready for me. He has even allowed me to choose my adversary." He laughed loudly and added, "He surely didn't expect me to challenge his legion to give a lesson to his effeminate centurions."

The fortuneteller wagged his head. "You stand at the gate of liberty," he said. "By training the young gladiators you can become the richest lanista of Bethsaida, even of Rome. Gold, beautiful women, and happiness will fall to you. And now you challenge the whole legion of Bethsaida." Cautiously looking around he said softly, "You surely will be poisoned or killed in some treacherous way."

The gladiator laughed. "Don't worry," he said. "And make the challenge public so the legion cannot back out."

"It's all the same to me," the fortuneteller said. "But remember, I have warned you. The letter will be ready in an hour, in Latin without a mistake." As Romelo sauntered away, he started to work immediately, mumbling and shaking his head. "What are *your* worries?" he heard someone asking. Looking up he saw Eleazar and his tall friend with the copper hair. Pointing at the letter he told them the sensational news of Romelo's challenging the whole legion.

"That will cost him his life," Eleazar said. "And just at the moment when I was going to ask him to become our lanista."

"I have some other news for you," the fortuneteller whispered excitedly to Eleazar. "Everywhere there are signs of growing resistance against the Romans. In Tiberias archers from Crete have riddled the Romans with arrows and the stone slingers from the Balearic Islands, who were sent in against them, have mutinied. In Jericho the zealots have excited the Spanish horse soldiers by telling them the Romans ridicule the Spaniards for not knowing how to deal with women. There is fighting everywhere. It looks very promising."

Judas was troubled to see the satisfaction of this man about so much unrighteousness. But the fortuneteller, appraising Judas' tall figure said, "You, too, should join with thousands of other Jewish men to start the revolt. The rebels were not even punished, I heard, because the most trusted veterans are discontented, too. In defiance of their rights they were ordered to stand sentinel without any compensation because the reinforcements Pilate asked for were refused. And now," he added, pointing at Romelo's letter, "the men of the legion are even forced to fight in the arena. They are no longer combat soldiers, at best only artisans who drag along whole towers to conquer a city. You two should go to the arena and see Romelo dispatch such fighters."

"I made up my mind to go," Eleazar said to the man. "I'll see you in a few days, after the fight."

As Judas and Eleazar walked away, Judas said, "I don't understand you, Eleazar. How can you hope to find supporters for a just cause in the arena? Your gladiators are perhaps heroic fighters, strong and skilful, but they are cruel. They kill for gold, out of vanity or, worse yet, sheer bloodthirstiness. They are less than beasts of prey that kill to allay their hunger. You are on the road to destruction, and the Lord have mercy on the young men who believe in you. For you will destroy them too."

"I am not, like you, a follower of the prophet of Nazareth," Eleazar retorted. "I don't believe in a Messiah who, at the head of the Jewish people, supported by legions of angels, will drive out the Romans. I believe in the art of swordmanship. The fight for victory and freedom will be difficult enough."

Judas sighed. "I see, Eleazar," he said dejectedly. "It is impossible to convince you that only the ways of the righteous can lead to victory and freedom. But if you choose to go to the arena and become impure, I would prefer not to meet you for the time being."

Surprised by this sudden outburst, Eleazar looked at his friend. He felt sorry for Judas who had such a narrow-minded point of view. "I promise you," he said, "that I will not forget the regulations of the laws of cleanliness."

Reluctantly Judas started to go, but suddenly he turned. "I didn't mean to say," he said, "that you cannot come to me in case you need me. Of course I will be glad to help you. A single blessing of my Master cleanses all impurity."

The day of the fight Eleazar, conquering his reluctance, sauntered to the arena. Afterwards he intended to ask Romelo to teach his Jewish and Arab youths. Feeling uneasy, he entered the great forehall of the amphitheatre built of white and pink marble from the Syrian quarries, its high columns delicately ornamented with sculptured arabesques of flowers, grapes, and birds. The clear water of a large basin reflected the lilies and iris growing in the humid moss around it. All the fountains were in full play, one in the middle spouting high into the air and round it grotesque bronze figures spraying water like a mist, cooling the whole surroundings. Typically Roman, Eleazar reflected, a forehall resembling an earthly paradise and behind it the inferno of the arena. It was the image of the empire itself concealing behind its splendor the suffering of the subjugated peoples.

Looking up from the flowers he suddenly saw the spy whom he had noticed before in the khan outside Bethsaida. He was accompanied by two legionnaires. To avoid him, Eleazar hastily went to the first entranceway, threw a coin on the table and followed the crowd up a narrow flight of stairs to the upper tiers of the amphitheatre, where the benches of the plebes were, far from the boxes of the patricians. In his Arab kaffiyeh he felt safe and at the same time he was protected against the blinding sunlight. He had a good place right above the principal gate. The people were pouring into the benches and the patricians at the other side were already taking their seats. A repeated sounding of trumpets solemnly announced the arrivals of the military commander, of the Roman governor and the representative of the Tetrarch. Eleazar was disappointed that the ridiculous Cassio, the fat centurion, had been replaced by the military commander of Tiberias who had come to Bethsaida especially for this occasion. The amphitheatre, now filled with people of every race and description, impatiently moving about in their seats, was like a sea of colored waves.

The military commander stood up and gave the signal to start the march around the arena according to the customs of the games. A herald, deftly swinging a heavy club about his head, ran in dancing step to the principal gate and delivered three hard blows against it. Twelve heralds, in oriental clothes with white ostrich feathers, ribbons, and glittering stones, entered the arena loudly sounding their long trumpets at the head of the procession. There was much laughter in the marble boxes of the Romans. Some shouted "African savages." But the military commander demanded silence. A hundred legionaries followed, parading smartly, demonstrating the self-confidence of the legion. After them came the gladiators. Romelo was not among them because this time he was not taking part in the regular fights. Then the fighters with trident and net passed by, their chests out, suggesting they had no fear of death, and knew only the will to fight. After an indifferent salute to the notables they grimly hailed Caesar. They were followed by the African archers, their eyes and teeth sparkling white in their coal-black faces, their ebony bows in a position to shoot. Their gold and silver quivers glittered in the sun.

"In those quivers are poison arrows," said a Greek who was seated next to Eleazar. "They use them to dispose of recalcitrant gladiators on the spot."

A group of *mastichons,* the scourgers, carrying long lashes tipped with lead, next marched past. Every twenty steps they rhythmically cracked their whips, laughing to show the pleasure they would have in lashing weakened or fallen fighters to spur them on. They were hailed by shouts from the upper tiers. Their cruelty apparently satisfied some instinct in the crowd, for they were even more warmly acclaimed than the gladiators.

The spectacle of the procession aroused somber thoughts in Eleazar. Judas was quite right to stay away. Here was a world of boundless cruelty, where each one sought the destruction of the other and all were spurred on by relentless lashings. He had come to this place to hire murderers with the intention of putting his young adherents in their charge.

Disguised as Charons there came the killers, who with a quick dagger stroke in throat or breast, dispatched the fallen fighters. And trailing last were the miserable men with the skinny mules that hauled the corpses out of the arena.

The Greek, interrupting Eleazar's thoughts, pointed to them. "They don't look very beautiful, but presently they will have work to do. Look at the women. They are wild again today. They never understand that instead of going home with them the fighters have an appointment with death."

"Don't worry. They will soon be interested in other fighters," said another.

When the procession had left the arena, Eleazar looked down at the lower tiers among the dignitaries. He saw only a few Jews but there were Greeks and Samaritans and many beautiful women in colorful garments embroidered in gold and silver, their breasts covered with gold plates that glittered in the sun. Suddenly, to his surprise, he discovered in the marble box of the delegate of the Tetrarch his friend Balthazar, the Jewish nobleman.

At that moment the herald announced the fight of Romelo against the chosen fighter of the legion. Eleazar, not wanting to miss anything of this combat waited eagerly. The excitement had mounted to its highest pitch, the whole arena was trembling with the undulating roar of the sea of people.

In the meanwhile, Romelo, his elbows on his muscular legs and his mighty head resting in his enormous hands, was seated on a marble block in the big dressing hall. Only a few minutes remained before the fight. For years he had looked forward to this moment, when his hatred of the legion would at last be gratified. Now he did not think of the freedom he would win. He was wholly absorbed in memories of the past. He saw himself again, a strong Teutonic youth marching in the train of a Roman cohort, sometimes doing duty as an interpreter for them in their parleys with rival Gothic tribes, but mostly fighting the Teutons. One day, after a bloody battle, he had found a young woman, whom he had dragged to his bed of furs, for she was his booty. She had become his wife and he had loved her passionately.

Because he was young and courageous he had been incorporated in a Roman auxiliary cohort and given the name of Romelo. And then the terrible thing happened. A decurion had followed his Anda everywhere with his eyes. Romelo had warned his wife to stay away from the Roman. But one day the decurion sent him off under a pretext and he reluctantly obeyed. But when he returned on the run, he saw the Roman had seized Anda. Again her cries sounded in his ears. Again he lived through the moment when he jumped like a wild beast on the decurion, took him by the throat and dashed his head on a stone. That was the greatest fraud of this Roman. He refused to put up a decent fight for the rightful possession of a woman. The decurion escaped him by dying. The cohort was sent back to Rome and his Anda in despair had killed herself. He, as one condemned to death, had been given the privilege of dying as a gladiator in the arena. Then Pontius Pilate had bought him as a slave. He had not obtained justice and a fierce hatred took hold of him, a hatred that made him invincible in nine-and-forty bloody combats to the death in the arena. Now the day of reckoning had come, the day of humiliation for the hated legionaries who had driven his Anda to her death.

At this moment one of his adherents touched his shoulder, "Romelo, it is nearly time." Glancing around he whispered, "You know of the fraud of the legion, don't you? I just heard of it."

Romelo started up from his musing. "What fraud?"

"The commander Cassio," the other said, "called all the centurions together to discuss your challenge. They have ordered reinforcing for the armor of the legionaries they have chosen for the fight. Your adversary has his lorica reinforced at the breast with metal plates hidden under the leather. The shield is reinforced and so is the helmet. You must protest against this and demand that the customary armor be used. You must not become the victim of their fraud."

Romelo, shrugging his shoulders in contempt, dismissed the subject.

Shortly afterward he entered the arena for his last fight. He gave the bust of Caesar the customary greeting and halted under the box of the commander of the legion and the prefect and saluted in a dignified way. A roaring applause came from the tiers of the plebes, but a cold silence prevailed in the boxes of the dignitaries. Romelo turned and saluted the thousands of spectators. Again the cheers resounded. Raising his sword he thanked them with a smile. His helmet in his left hand, his sword in the right, he entered the square of tamped earth in the middle of the arena quietly waiting until the crowd was silent. He would make use of his right as the challenger to speak.

Suddenly a dead silence prevailed. Loud came the voice of Romelo, "As a soldier of the Roman legion I was unjustly sentenced to death because I killed a decurion who had taken my wife from me. Today for my fiftieth combat I have challenged the legion to an honest fight to obtain satisfaction. Neither my helmet nor my shield nor the rest of my armor is reinforced."

A wild cheering rose from the highest benches, for they understood that Romelo alluded to some trick of the Romans. "Death to them!" they shouted. "Give no quarter, Romelo!"

Romelo raised his hand. His face stiffened. Now that the moment of revenge had come he felt a strange void within him. He saw the whole arena red with blood and the crowd an immense monster with ten thousand waving hands, fierce heads, and open mouths from which wild shouts were coming forth. Anda was standing before him. As from afar he heard his own voice saying, "The best fighter of the legion will be my adversary. He will enter now. Honor to him too."

The trumpets sounded. The first fighter of the legion, a decurion, came into the arena and after the customary greetings entered the square in the middle. The swords were crossed in a mock combat and both the gladiators withdrew. The commander of the legion stood up and gave the signal for the fighting to begin.

While he was waiting for the sign of the tuba, the signal to take position for the fight to the death, Romelo was blinded by the sunlight reflecting on the helmet of his adversary. At this moment it seemed he stood in front of the cursed decurion. And again this assaulter would attain his end by treachery.

"Watch out, Romelo," the plebes cried, "he is like an armored fort."

Romelo did not hear. He watched his adversary closely. He knew it was impossible to cleave the helmet or the lorica. He would let him attack. Feeling safe in his reinforced armor, the other laid himself recklessly open. Several times the sword of the legionary touched Romelo's shield, and Romelo muttered, "Anda, look, the cowardly decurion is a good fighter after all."

Thinking that Romelo was scoffing at him by whispering contemptuous words the legionary attacked more furiously. The public became restless. Hundreds of thousands of drachmas and sesterces had been bet on Romelo and he did not show any fighting spirit. He did not even attack; he only kept to the defense. And the attacks of the legionary were courageous and skilful. The commander of the legion showed his pleasure by beating the rail of his box with the flat of his sword. It was the signal for all the soldiers to burst out in applause. The restlessness of the crowd mounted. Romelo was powerless against the legionary. Why? He surely must have been poisoned. This rumor spread like wildfire through the audience.

"End it, Romelo! Kill him!" the crowd shouted.

But Romelo did not hear. He saw Anda's face very near him and he heard only her voice urging him on, whispering: Now, now—this is the moment. Then he laid himself obviously open. The legionary attacked, putting his full weight behind his sword. Romelo, parrying weakly with the shield, warded the blow off with his sword. The weapon of his adversary slid off. Then Romelo thrust his sword into the throat of the decurion, the only vulnerable spot. He staggered and fell, a lifeless block.

Ignoring the roars of the crowd, Romelo went to the dead man, and, taking up his fallen helmet and the shield, held them up to show the fraud to the whole amphitheatre.

The wild shouting increased. "Away with the cowards of the legion! The cheaters! Away with them!"

This was Romelo's hour. The unrighteous were punished and destroyed. He felt the waves of enthusiasm going over him, and slowly the tension within him subsided. It was as if he had awakened from a bad dream. Then he looked at his fallen adversary. The crowd was still shouting. But there before him lay not the hated decurion. It had been a delusion. He had struck down an innocent man. Haltingly he stood there, the legionary's shield and helmet still in his hands. He looked up. Thousands of eyes were on him. Then he bent down and respectfully covered the dead man with his shield and helmet.

Twelve members of the legion entered the arena. They took up the dead decurion and carried him away on their shields, as from all sides the people shouted, "Long live Romelo!"

The shouting stopped immediately when the second champion of the legion entered the arena. By his light and supple movements Romelo knew that this time his adversary wore the regular light armor of the legion.

From the start Romelo took the upper hand, playing with his adversary like a cat with a mouse. It was like the fighting of a trainer and his pupil in a fighter school, a demonstration of skill, apparently a game. The whole arena roared with enthusiasm. But suddenly the voice of Romelo sounded through the arena, "End of the fight." His sword flickered in the sun. With a quick thrust he pierced the hand of his adversary whose sword fell to the sand. Driving back the wounded man, he picked up the weapon, went to the box of the commander, and tossed it upwards where it was caught by a soldier.

"I beg of the commander to give this sword back to the courageous soldier," Romelo said respectfully.

Through this request by the victor, the public lost its right to judge the life or death of the vanquished. The upper tiers broke out in insults. Romelo was a coward, an old woman.

Paying no heed to the shouting, Romelo requested that the commander release him from the next fight, which was against one of his own pupils, whose weaknesses he knew too well. He was a gladiator, but not a murderer, he said. The Roman soldiers shouted that he was a coward who feared the next fight. But in the meantime the dignitaries in the box of the commander, after quickly considering the matter, concluded that continuation of the combats with any one fighter of the legion would be useless.

The commander stood up and in a voice that could be heard throughout the arena announced that the courage of the invincible gladiator Romelo, once a soldier of the glorious legion, was beyond dispute. He had shown what every soldier could achieve if he had courage, strength, and endurance. Pompously he concluded, "We honor Romelo, who was one of us, who underwent his punishment and who is now a free man."

A slight mockery passed over Romelo's face as he saluted the cheering crowd, and while the women threw flowers and love-notes and ribbons to him he went to the nearest gate, refusing to make the victor's round of the arena.

The sound of the trumpet was announcing the first of the regular games as Eleazar made his way through the crowd to the exit. The air was heavy with the odors of perfumes from Arabia and pastries mixed with the nauseating smell of the arena, where the sun scorched the sand saturated with blood. He went under the arcades to the dressing-rooms. In the fighters' hall he saw them preparing for the next fights wreathed in flowers. Their women embraced them and then hurried off to the amphitheatre to find their seats.

Entering the smaller hall, where so few fighters returned alive, Eleazar saw the huge figure of Romelo near a bench on which rested his sword and armor. He was naked. With his white skin, shiny with the oil rubbed on before the fight, he resembled a marble statue. In his hand he held a papyrus scroll. That must be Pilate's charter of liberty, Eleazar reflected. As he stood there, a charon of the arena darted through the hall. A dagger flashed.

"Romelo!" Eleazar shouted, running to him. It was too late. The dagger was left sticking in the back of the giant. Romelo tried to turn in a gesture of defense, staggered and fell. The attacker had already disappeared through the nearest gate.

Eleazar knelt beside the gladiator who was bleeding heavily but was still alive. Then he hurried away to call the physician of the arena.

While dressing the wound the physician whispered to Eleazar it must have been the work of the humiliated legion. Romelo should be taken to safety immediately, he said, for they would surely make another attempt to kill him.

Eleazar ran to the entrance gate of the patricians, where he expected to find Balthazar's carriage, and saw him just entering it. When he told his friend what had happened, Balthazar put his carriage and servants at Eleazar's disposal and directed him to take the wounded man to the farm behind his house. Balthazar then went back to the amphitheatre to avoid attracting attention.

The physician and Eleazar carried the unconscious gladiator through the empty arcades to the carriage. They were unnoticed, for everyone had gone back to the amphitheatre. Then the coachman whipped up the horses. Fortune favored Eleazar that day, for in a side street he saw his friend Judas. He called out. When Judas stepped into the carriage he recognized Romelo, and saw the gladiator was dying.

"Stay with him, Judas. This is Balthazar's carriage and Romelo is being taken to his farm. Take good care of him. I have something urgent to do. I will be with you soon." And he jumped out and disappeared.

Judas looked uneasily at the deathly pale face of the gladiator. This encounter was as strange as the first one. Remembering the rowdiness with which Romelo had slapped him on the back, he was moved now by the helplessness of the giant. Carefully he supported the heavy body to protect it from the jolts of the vehicle. As they neared Balthazar's farm, a mulecart with a large black coffin on it passed them at a wild pace. As the cart swung into the farm gate Judas saw with astonishment that it was Eleazar who was whipping up the mules. He did not understand what all these strange happenings meant.

When Romelo regained consciousness he cast a puzzled look about him. Then he fell back into the dreams of his fever. He saw strange visions. Again he stood in the burning sand of the arena. But the arena was entirely empty. Nobody had come to honor the great gladiator. The arena was very small, a narrow circle of marble benches closing in on him. And his sword grew larger and larger. Then the circle began to withdraw from him. He stood on a wide plain but suddenly there were trees, the dense woods of the North, old oaks with rough knotty stems, beeches and elms, and he felt the cool shadow of their mighty crowns. And then he heard the voice of Anda, his wife. She came near, she embraced him, and covered his face with kisses. Now he was seated on a throne. He put his sword down and she knelt at his feet. And he heard her consoling words as he put his hand on her blond hair. Then she disappeared and suddenly the sky and the earth trembled. And there was lightning and thunder and he looked into the depths of a sea with black waves. And then he heard a voice admonishing him to believe no longer in fighting and violence but in peace and in love. His hands should desist from the sword, for he who took up the sword would bleed to death. Many were the steps he must mount to reach the tower of deliverance. He saw the sun rising in splendor after the rains, opening the blossoms. And before him was a radiant road between flowers.

He opened his eyes and saw the head of a man with red hair bent over him. Next to him was a white figure with wondrous eyes, who put his hand on his forehead and seemed to see through him. It was as if a bright ray of sunlight had driven off the last bit of darkness.

"Is the worst past now, Master?" Romelo heard clearly. The white figure bent over him speaking words of peace. Then he saw him no more. But there were two women now and he heard a girl's voice saying, "His face is peaceful now." And a deeper voice answered, "He is saved."

"His fighting in darkness is behind him," said the man with the red hair. Fighting? Romelo saw his foot heavy on the neck of a defeated adversary. It was glued in blood. He pulled and pulled, but in vain. He was terrified. He felt a woman's hand take his own hand, cramped to a fist in suffering, and lead him to a marble stone, white and pure, a firm support for his foot. All about him was light and he fell into a quiet sleep.

The Praetorian Guard had offered a hundred silver argurions reward for information as to the whereabouts of Romelo, alive or dead. The commander, Cassio, asked his good friend Dulachio, a fabulously rich merchant who sponsored many of the games in the arena, to send out his twelve Numidian slaves to find Romelo. They, like bloodhounds, cruised the whole region, only to return emptyhanded, refusing to go on with the search despite the promised reward. Dulachio's steward, however, had heard money jingling in their pockets. He therefore was on his guard and that night, as he heard hasty steps in the house and the creaking of a gate, he went to see what was happening. In the torchlight he saw the slaves standing about a coffin ornamented with an ivory "R." The oldest of them, apparently frightened, was trying to hide some scrolls in the folds of his tunic, but the steward ordered him to hand them over. One of the scrolls was signed by the physician of the arena attesting that Romelo was dead, and the other that his body was in the coffin. The steward ordered the slaves to take the coffin with the scrolls to the Praetorian Guard. They nodded obediently and carried it away.

The young centurion of the guard understood not a word of their confused story. However, he knew of Dulachio's promise to Cassio, his commander. The Numidians had apparently succeeded in finding Romelo's body. He recognized the coffin as the one that had been paraded through the streets of Bethsaida before the fight. At the meeting of the centurions discussing Romelo's letter challenging the legion, he himself had proposed the parade of a coffin with the name Romelo on it. By thus showing that the legion was certain of Romelo's defeat it would boost the morale of the legionaries. But Cassio said one big "R" was enough.

He looked again at the coffin. It seemed strange that it was closed with so many nails. However, after rereading the declarations he ordered the slaves to carry the coffin to the death house. In the morning they could come back for their reward.

The coffin with the large "R" was buried with full honors by the legion. The commander of the garrison, the obese Cassio, followed the procession, mounted ponderously on his horse, and in beautiful words he commemorated the courageous legionary. Dulachio, as the Maecenas of the arena, sat proudly in his costly litter surrounded by his Numidian slaves. And nobody in Bethsaida Julias doubted that Romelo was dead and buried, except the steward of Dulachio. When he met Judas some time later, he discreetly asked him some questions about the gladiator Romelo. But Judas answered that it was better not to speak of the gladiator Romelo who no longer existed.

Now Eleazar could not win him over to become a lanista for the resistance.

12

The sun had gone down in a golden glow behind the mountains as the Master and his followers, walking up a gentle slope, reached a plateau protected from the cold winds by high rock walls. The disciples were tired, and, when the Master withdrew to a spot some distance away, they looked around for a place to sleep for the night and lay down on the grass. The sounds in the valley were dying, the first stars appeared while the moon shone with a soft light. The call of a night bird broke the silence.

From where he was resting Judas could see the white figure of the Master standing in the silvery light, praying to his Father. All burdens seemed to have fallen from him, and suddenly there was a shower of falling stars above him. A blessing of light, Judas thought, a sign from heaven. Looking at the Master, lifted in prayer, it seemed to Judas he was a being from a higher world. At last Judas fell asleep and awoke only when the sun was well up.

In the clear morning light, while a lark with a jubilant song was flying higher and higher into the sky, the Master gathered his disciples about him, naming them one by one. And the last was Judas Iscariot. He gave them power to cast out unclean spirits, and to heal sickness and disease. He said he would send them forth to the lost sheep of Israel. They should preach that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, and they should heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead and cast out devils.

Judas felt this was the most exalted moment of his life. He trembled with emotion. He was ready to accomplish everything the Master had commanded. Yet, he doubted whether he, too, would be able to call back the dead like the other disciples. He did not think of gathering money for his own sake, but was it right not to accept it for the sick and the poor? Often the Master spoke words that filled him with new hope, as when he said he had not come to bring peace, but the sword. But no sooner had the word "sword" been said than the Master turned the idea of struggle in another direction, vague and incomprehensible to Judas. Many times Judas pondered other words of the Master. Why, for instance, should the people be set at variance with each other, the son against the father, the daughter against the mother? Wasn't this wrong? Shouldn't there be harmony in families as well as in the multitude? What was the use of miraculous healing, of making the blind see, if it led only to strife and discord? Now the Master had taken up the fight against whole cities: Bethsaida, Chorazin, and Capernaum were unworthy, Capernaum would be brought down to hell, and the day of judgment would be more tolerable for Sodom than for Capernaum. Yet the Master said he was gentle and humble of heart. Why then this upbraiding of whole cities? At some places the multitude had even threatened to stone him. Therefore it was good the Master sent them out two by two to fulfil their task.

On his first journey Judas went with Philip, whose pure Galilean would be better understood than Judas' Judean dialect. They carried nothing with them, as the Master had ordered. Philip warned Judas they were now in regions where they would suffer many bitter experiences. Gazing over the landscape, Judas saw only a few fig trees and olives. In the stony fields only weeds were thriving. Bare rocks reflected the blinding sunlight. There was no spring or brook. The most industrious could do no useful work here. The inhabitants were discontented and more inclined to scorn the stranger than to take him into their houses, Philip said. Judas would see these days how difficult the life of a disciple could be. But Judas lifted his head as a challenge to such difficulties.

As they approached a hamlet Philip warned him it would be in vain to speak to the people. But Judas went to the first house. On the road he had taken a small fig from a miserable tree, and passing a poor wheat field he had plucked off a single ear, as was allowed by law. One at a time he put the grains in his mouth. When he knocked, the door was opened by a man who had evidently watched him. Judas greeted him with kind words.

"What do you want?" the man asked disagreeably.

"Peace be with you and your house," Judas said. "I would like to speak with you as with a good friend."

"A friend?" the man said scornfully. "Does a friend steal the wheat from my field and the fruit from my tree? He who does not work can only be my enemy." And the door slammed shut.

Judas stepped hastily back. He heard a woman's voice complaining that it would be better to let the stranger enter and hear the word of God. But the man shouted that lazy people who stole fruit and wheat would only misuse the word of God. Still a little upset, Judas knocked at the second house. He heard voices and saw eyes peering through a hole in the door, but it remained shut. At the third house the door was opened but closed again before he could say a word.

"Here are living embittered patriots," Philip said, "who believe only in the sword. It is difficult to bring them the message of peace."

Again Judas knocked, this time without any hope of success. But the door was immediately opened, and, although it was a mealy-mouthed voice that asked him to come in, Judas felt relieved. The man, apparently eager to oblige, brought two cups of cool water and said loudly, "We here are adversaries of Caesar and also of the Tetrarch, and you come to speak of the liberation. We refuse to pay taxes, we're ready to take up the sword. . . ."

"Friend," Philip said, seeing the cunning in the man's face and hearing somebody in the adjoining room, "he who takes the sword will perish by the sword." Pushing back the cups of water he added, "We came to bring you peace, but we cannot give it to you as long as you desire strife."

Philip rose and went out, beckoning Judas to follow him. The door slammed. "We were like sheep among wolves," Philip said with a sigh. "One single word could have ruined us. They were spies for the Romans." Carefully they shook the dust from their sandals as they silently left the hamlet. Even in the soft twilight the landscape looked forbidding, full of thistles and thorny bushes, with here and there a lone tree without leaves.

To comfort Philip, Judas said that in the next village they would surely be welcome. But Philip said they should not go there after night had fallen. Some time before, rich merchants had been robbed there, and poor preachers would certainly be mocked and abused. They would spend the night under the open sky. As they walked on looking for a place to sleep Judas, tired and discouraged, asked himself what was the sense of wandering about like this in the dust of the roads. Was anybody really served by it or the deliverance brought any nearer?

At last they found a spot protected by some rocks. Judas, lying on his back, his arms folded under his head, looked at the stars and his melancholy thoughts went back to the times when he had slept in the cave, well taken care of by Aram and Jacob, and the angels had come to visit him. Philip had fallen asleep right away. His face seemed thinner than ever. In the distance a hyena cried. Near by another answered in the chilly night.

At dawn they rose, cold and stiff, shivering and hungry. Judas brushed his clothes free of leaves and sand, and helped Philip to dust off his. When they came to the next village the boys threw stones at them and they had to leave. Philip had been right not to ask for shelter there. Judas, depressed by hunger and cold, felt a growing antagonism against those who did not want to be served by him, and who seemed to have allied themselves with the devils to drive out the tidings he brought. Here, good seed fell upon stony places and could not sprout.

As if he had guessed Judas' thoughts Philip pointed out that this was the region of muddy wells, withered fruit, and impenetrable thickets, a land of darkness. But yonder the fertile land was awaiting them. It was good the Master had sent them here to start their first mission, for after these poor fields they would soon walk through green pastures, and they would see the clear waters of the sea. As they came down from the mountain, hungry and thirsty, they saw before them the land of Gennesareth like a fertile garden full of flowers and singing birds, a land of happiness. Philip said God created in the land of Canaan seven lakes, but only one was chosen: the Sea of Galilee. He told how, one evening, as he returned home with his boat full of fish, a Roman warship called him and he was forced to sell his whole catch of fish for a single prutah. He obeyed cheerfully. A decurion asked him why he laughed, and he answered he had given his fish cheaply, so why shouldn't he laugh? He did no one an injustice, did he? Besides, God would give him back in abundance what he had lost. Then he had put into Capernaum. A friend asked where his fish were, and he told what had happened. A Roman centurion, standing near by, threw some gold pieces in his boat and disappeared before he could thank him.

"I would have cursed the Romans who took the fish," Judas exclaimed, "and I would have prayed to the Lord to sink their ship."

"Judas, Judas!" Philip admonished, and shook his head.

An hour later they arrived at Philip's house. The door stood open, and as they entered Judas saw the joy on the faces of Philip's wife and two daughters. The woman insisted that they stay and rest, but Philip said they must go on. The Master had begun his task in a land of abundance, in the light of a new day. Now he was going to preach and heal in regions where he would meet with opposition. His disciples should stand by him. So they left.

The end of the journey brought some peace to Judas' tormented soul. It was as if all evil spirits had departed. In the villages they took care of the sick and anointed them with oil. And the rich gave them things the poor needed. Judas forgot the evil they had encountered.

When they came home Judas did not see Mary. In his longing for her he went quickly to the small garden and looked up at the window of her room. At this moment Simon Peter passed by. He said coldly that Mary was not around. Maybe Judas could first go and greet the Master. Deeply hurt, Judas went hastily out of the garden. Peter watched him go. He had not been mistaken in Judas. First came Mary of Magdala and then the Master.

It was not often that Mary talked with Judas and when she did their conversation was mostly about the daily needs of the group. Again and again she was struck with how much devotion Judas rendered even the smallest service. When the tall figure with the copper hair and the candid eyes appeared among the women many came with requests to him. She rarely greeted him first. She always felt a hesitation in pronouncing his name, for its sound stirred her. Something about Judas reminded her of her former life. What it was she did not know. Had he, perhaps, the same hidden doubts she herself had formerly known? Sometimes, after their work was done, Mary and Brodhe and the other women would sit together talking. When John passed by or Philip or one of the others, she invited them to join them. But never had she invited Judas. And now, pondering it, she could not explain it. Never before had she realized that by forcing him to keep aloof, she was raising in the faithful Judas a vague feeling of uncertainty, while inwardly he was perhaps longing for company.

Whenever the disciples went off on difficult missions Mary wanted them to leave with the feeling of having a home, so that its peace, in their memory, would fortify them. When they returned, wayworn, she was more heedful of their comfort than usual. One day, as the group returned, she quickly brought the first basin of water to the Master and bent down to wash his feet. But he would not let her. She hurried away and brought the second basin to Judas.

Judas thanked her, casting a glance at the older disciples who still had to wait. He heard them muttering. James, the son of Alfeus, said, "Judas should not think too much of himself, even though Mary has taken care of him first." The blood rushed to Judas' face, for Mary's care and kindness had made him very happy. But James still had not received his water and in his irritation he looked angrily at Mary.

Judas, trying to prevent the friction that might hurt her, brought a basin to James who accepted it with ill grace, and said, "To me this beautiful woman pays not the least attention."

Judas looked anxiously at Mary to see if she had caught James' angry gaze. But she showed no sign of being hurt. She went on with her work, as if nothing had happened, till all the disciples were taken care of.

The following morning at breakfast Judas saw Mary taking special care of James. She wanted him to forget his unfriendliness, Judas thought. He could not keep his eyes off her. He liked it that she was taller than most women. And she was formed to perfection, as he could tell from the suggested outlines of her figure through the robe that covered her. Although her hair was hidden under a veil, parts of it were visible. He loved the golden color of it and the whiteness of her neck. In her haste to take care of everybody her face, usually pale, was rosy now. She was as beautiful as a rose of Sharon with eyes pure as the waters of Hesbon. His father was wrong when he said such a woman could not be found in real life. Suddenly she turned to him, smiling, somewhat wistfully, he thought. And he responded, "May your day be happy, Mary."

This time he left it to her to begin the conversation. For he had often noticed that when he spoke to her first, she always replied in a friendly way but never pursued the subject. Now, he thought, she watched him attentively with her great blue eyes.

"Do you ever go to Kerioth, Judas, to see your parents?" she asked. "The journey is not so far and not dangerous at this time, is it?"

Surprised by her sudden question, Judas said, "I often made plans to go, but I never went. Perhaps I'll go later, when I have accomplished more."

"But you never feel lonely here in Galilee?"

Lonely? How could he feel lonely near her? But he couldn't tell her what he felt in his secret heart: that he was hungry for love. And to hide his feelings for her he said airily, "Oh, I'll see my parents soon. Maybe some time in the autumn at the house of friends in Jerusalem."

Mary turned to Philip asking him about his wife and daughters. As she went out of the room, Philip said, "How obliging she always is to all of us, without making any distinction."

Later that morning as Judas, alone, set off to perform a task, she said to him, "If ever you are longing for company, Judas, don't be aloof. We all are happy to see you among us."

She waited till he was ready to go. He felt her concern was directed toward him especially. As he went off, he saw her in all her beauty, a queen, smiling at him, her favorite, who still was but the last of the twelve. But to him had she first brought the water and she had talked longer with him than with Philip. When she asked if he didn't feel lonely, naturally she meant something else. She wanted to find out whether he, being near her, was happy. It was a subtle way to approach him, he thought, of which Philip obviously was not aware. But now, pondering it, it was quite clear to him that she sought his company. At this sudden certainty his heart overflowed with happiness. On his journey the flowers everywhere seemed more fragrant, and the birds were singing now for him alone. All those he encountered on his road could not help but see the radiance of the love within him. The world was wide and light and gold.

The followers, tired of walking in the temple and through the badly paved streets of Jerusalem, made their way slowly upward toward the Mount of Olives. The Master went alone, deep in thought. Suddenly he halted, plucked off some twigs with green leaves and wiped the dust off his feet, as if in leaving Jerusalem he wanted to cleanse himself from all stains. Judas passed on in silence. He always felt a vague fear when on the way to the Mount of Olives he had a view of this mighty Jerusalem. Its power scattered all his illusions of purification and deliverance. Everything seemed unassailable, ordered for eternity, the good as well as the evil. How could the Master possibly change this with words alone! Yet had not Isaiah prophesied that one day the wilderness would blossom as the rose, with the glory of Lebanon? And in the kingdom of the Messiah would be songs and everlasting joy, and sorrow and sighing would flee. The Master already was considered by many to be the Messiah.

The Master had halted now, his eyes directed on high, as if he were listening. A ray of sunlight falling on his hair made a golden sheen about his head. Was he listening to the voice of his Father? As Jesus sat down, Judas questioned whether the disciples were really the servants of the Son of God, the Messiah come to earth to found the kingdom. He prayed fervently that God would make Jesus a king on earth and with him raise the disciples, his faithful servants. Judas bent his head, listening intently. But no sign from heaven came.

Dispirited, Judas sat down too. His gaze wandered over Jerusalem, over her mighty ramparts and high walls, her marble palaces surrounded by gardens and the huge temple, now crowned with the flaming gold of the sunset. Below it, hidden in dark shadows, was the Kidron where the blood from the altars flowed down. The people on the terraces of the temple looked from here like peaceful figures. Judas was impressed by the beauty of the Holy City, with the smoke of the burnt offerings on the rock altar rising to heaven, while the sound of cymbals and the singing of a procession were vaguely audible. Further on rose threateningly, indestructibly, the tower of Antonia, the Roman fortress where the cuirasses and spears of the soldiers glittered like silver and gold. The unassailable might of the Romans dominated the upper part of the city where behind the temple and palaces of Caiaphas and the Maccabees the stone mass of Herod's palace was visible with its mighty columns and awe-inspiring towers. In the Thyropian valley corners of the bazaar were visible with stalls and teeming people.

On the hills in hovels lived the poor, endlessly toiling, hoping for a better future. They formed the great following of the Master. Were these feeble people the ones who must dislodge the Roman soldiers from their fortresses? The thought was unsettling, for there were still the cold, conceited Herodians leaning on the Roman power and the Pharisees and the Sadducees who troubled themselves more about might and riches than about the kingdom of God. Even the people themselves were often greedy and cruel. Jerusalem was not a city of peace and purity, of noble priests and prophets. It was an unconquerable stronghold of hypocrites and formalists who misused the law to oppress the people. The mighty among the Jews and the Roman tyrants were like vultures living on a carcass. Judas sighed. In his anxiety he looked to the Master as if seeking succour. The Master rose. The apostles had risen too now and watched him, awaiting his word. His eyes on the temple, the Master spoke the words of Solomon at its dedication, asking that God forgive the people of Israel, when they had turned from their sin as God had taught them.

Judas was crushed. This time again the Master did not ask God to send his host of angels with flaming swords to drive out the Roman tyrants and bad priests, and to chastise the people for their sins. The Master only asked forgiveness for their sins. It was all in vain—hopeless. Judas sat down again on the stone and covered his tired head with his hands.

13

In long caravans the pilgrims went up singing gaily to the feast of the Passover. When they approached the temple they stopped singing and mixed with the crowds around the stalls of merchandise.

It was the first time that Judas had accompanied the Master with the whole group to the temple. With dignity the Master went through the throng. Spellbound the people watched him, and instinctively they made way, as for a king, to let him pass. So the Master and his disciples approached the eastern gate, that of Susa. There the traders loudly hawked their wares; there, too, began the domain of the money-changers. Everyone had to offer his shekel as tax for the temple. Since foreign coins were often stamped with pagan inscriptions and were therefore unfit for use in the holy treasure, many foreigners had to change their money. In addition to the *kolbon,* the usual fee, they were often forced to pay an extra coin. Formerly this changing took place outside the temple, but now the exchange booths and stalls of the merchants were set up in the court of the Gentiles and through the full length of Solomon's Porch. To draw attention the changers tapped coins on their tables.

The gold pieces, carefully folded in cloth, they kept hidden in little metal boxes to protect them from thieves. In this portico were also the vendors of white doves packed together in great cages.

As the Master and his disciples entered the court of the Gentiles they saw scores of oxen and many sheep and lambs shut in pens. The stench of animals and filth filled the air. And here, Judas marvelled, must the Master preach, amid quarreling hagglers, his voice drowned out by lowing and bleating! The Master's face was aflame with indignation and Judas saw him bend down and take some loose ropes that he raised like a whip as if to drive out all the merchants. In the belief he understood what the Master wanted, Judas ran to the oxen, opened the pens, and drove them out with loud cries. The big animals ran off, dashing against each other, milling around in great confusion. The frightened traders and onlookers ran, shouting, slipping in the filth, as the animals rushed upon them. Changers' booths and cages of doves were upset with a jangle of coins and the fluttering of the birds. The Master himself overturned the last booth. He told the dove vendors to take their birds away and not make his Father's house a place of business.

Although pleased with the result, Judas was somewhat ashamed of his own vehemence, and, seeing the Master's calmness, all violence left him, too. When a huge cattle-dealer came up menacingly, Judas looked the man in the face and said, "Speak up in God's temple, if you dare!" The trader opened his mouth and closed it without a word. "Go, sinner!" Judas said. "Look for your cattle and bring them no more into the temple." The man stood undecided a moment, then ran to search for his oxen and sheep. Judas was convinced that hereafter justice would prevail, that the guilty would be chased away like sheep. None would again assail the Master, for he had upheld the holiness of the temple.

And Judas looked proudly at the bystanders, some of whom showed undisguised admiration. Some seemed astonished and others hostile, but nobody dared judge the prophet of Nazareth. One of them came to the Master asking timidly what sign would he show them?

The Master answered, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up."

The crowd looked horrified. Destroy the temple? Their temple by which they were reconciled to the unbearable tyranny of the oppressor? Ten thousand laborers had worked nearly fifty years to build it with materials brought on thousands of wagons. Their temple in all its magnificence of colored marble, costly mosaics and glittering pinnacles—should this be destroyed? And this Nazarene would raise it up in three days?

To Judas too the Master's words were incomprehensible, although he knew there must be a great secret in them. But the others attached a false significance to them. The Master should not have threatened them with the wrath of God should they dare profane the temple again. Now he had given them a weapon to use against him. Judas heard them saying to each other that neither Caiaphas nor Annas nor even Herod had ever taken a stand against the traders. As the crowd dispersed with the words about the destruction of the temple ringing in their ears, Judas was aware of the hatred and longing for revenge some of them were harboring.

Shortly afterward, when Judas was in Bethsaida, he passed the palace of Dulachio, the rich Jew who had become a Roman. As he looked with undisguised distaste on the building lighted with many torches, the door opened and a man came hurrying out to him. Judas recognized Dulachio's steward, the same one who had asked him questions about

Romelo. The man implored him to come in and see his sick child, for he knew Judas was one of the followers of the prophet of Nazareth who healed the sick and raised up the dead.

Judas hesitated. He knew it would be difficult to call the Master or one of the first disciples to the sickbed because they were not yet in the town. However, seeing the man's anxiety, Judas felt he should try to help the child. But it was with great aversion that he crossed the threshold of the Roman palace. Entering a back door they went to a badly lighted room, where the little boy lay on a mattress on the floor. Two Numidian slaves watching him stepped aside as Judas approached. The child was twitching with convulsions, white foam flecked his mouth, and his eyes burned in his pale face. Judas was moved. He knelt down and prayed to God to give him strength for the sake of the child. Suddenly all hesitation left him. He felt a radiance within himself, and felt that angels were about, assisting him, a humble instrument, now filled with the mercy of God. And this inner radiance shone on his face.

The father asked him respectfully, "Sir, if you can, heal my child." Judas answered him that all things were possible, if he believed. Then the man said, "Sir, I believe in the Lord's mercy."

Judas felt the conviction in the man's voice. This was the moment of God. Again he prayed. As he opened his eyes the child, still with the foam on his lips, rolled about on the mattress. Judas took the boy's head in his hands and looked into his eyes. He put his cool hand across the child's hot forehead holding his shoulder firmly with the other hand. "Evil spirit," he said, "come out, and enter no more into him." The child screamed, struggled and after a last convulsion lay motionless.

Anxiously one of the slaves asked whether he was dead.

But Judas stroked the boy's hands, and opening his eyes, the child looked at him with a feeble smile. Judas took him in his arms and gave him to his father who kissed the little boy. The Numidian slaves fell on their knees and brought the hem of Judas' robe to their lips muttering unintelligible words.

"They think you're a god," the steward whispered to Judas as he turned to leave. With tears in his eyes, the father thanked Judas and asked him what he could give to show his gratitude. Judas said, "God healed the child. Give to the poor what you think just." He promised to come back soon to see the child, and he went away with the joyous feeling that through faith he also could remove mountains. But alas, he knew, the true faith was not always in him. . . .

In his desire to avoid arousing attention on the way, the Master on this journey to Capernaum with the disciples took the smaller roads through the valleys of Galilee. This time he did not preach. He devoted himself entirely to teaching his disciples and giving them strength. Again and again he spoke of the coming time when he would be delivered over to the priests, and he spoke too of his coming death and his resurrection within three days. These words caused great consternation in Judas, but they seemed to make no great impression on the other disciples. Their ears were deaf, their souls dulled, it seemed to Judas. They made light of the Master's clear warnings, none of them showing any concern, and Judas wondered sometimes whether it was only thoughtlessness, or real lack of love for the Master. Didn't they understand that something terrible was going to happen to him? Sometimes it was as if their love toward others, their self-sacrifice and humility, were declining and they were more proud and jealous than before.

On the road to Capernaum an argument arose as to who was the greatest among them. Judas took no part. He did not feel wronged because Peter and the sons of Zebedee took precedence over him. He knew only too well that he was the last of the twelve. But as their words became sharper and sharper Judas watched them in disapproval.

Peter, irritated by Judas' attitude, told him, "Don't you judge us. You know very well you don't belong to the first among us."

Judas flared up at Peter's disdainful tone. Angrily he said, "Yes I am the very last indeed, Peter. And yet, the Lord has chosen me to heal a child." And he told the name of the child.

The Master did not interfere in the argument between the disciples. He walked by himself, his head bent in thought. As they came to Capernaum, however, and entered the house where they always stayed, the Master asked them what it was they were arguing about along the way? They kept silent for they would not acknowledge that they had argued about who was the greatest among them.

The Master called the twelve together and said that he who wished to be the greatest should be the servant of all. He brought a small child to them and said whoever would humble himself like the child would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

He himself would not be the greatest, Judas reflected. He would be happy when the Almighty gave him the same power to fulfil his task as he gave the other disciples. And Judas fancied himself as having a great humility.

As they scattered, Philip came to Judas saying, "Judas, on the road I heard you saying loudly to Peter: 'I have healed a child.' Didn't you seek then to be the greatest?"

"No," Judas said stubbornly. "Peter was unjust toward me and in my anger I wanted to silence him." But in saying these words he was suddenly startled, for God had healed the child, not he. And in his conceit he had shouted: "I have healed the child." Then he remembered John's fear that he might become a thief of the treasures of the Lord. And now he had appropriated the power of God. With God's mercy, Peter also could have healed the child. "Philip," he said, "not only was I proud before Peter, but also before God." Then Judas, the last of the twelve, went to Peter and admitted he had been proud.

As Judas went away, Peter smiled. He was glad the young disciple did not seek to be the greatest. Judas had no great wisdom, Peter reflected, but he did work for righteousness . . . in his own way.

In a joyful mood the group went through the friendly villages and green hills surrounding the Sea of Gennesareth whose clear waters reflected even the smallest cloud. Judas, a child of the wild meadows and unfertile fields of Judea, was often moved by the luxuriance of the land. Often he stopped to watch the sunlight playing upon the water and the fields dotted with flowers. He saw the pelicans fishing undisturbed by the approaching group. He washed his face and hands in the warm springs. But never did he think of the prophecy of Isaiah that in this glorious land, this land of the Gentiles, a new light would rise, the light of the Messiah.

They had travelled almost all the roads in the valley of the Jordan: over the bridge at Jericho, through the capital Sepphoris, through the mountains of Nebulon toward Jerusalem. Only in Tiberias had the Master never been. But from afar Judas had seen the golden palace of the Tetrarch with its marble terraces and colonnades entwined with green and flowers, where Herod Antipas, the corrupt Idumean, lived with Herodias, his brother's wife. On the western shores he had seen many from foreign lands: Arabs, Syrians and sly Greeks living among the Galileans, mostly Gentiles. Here the Master had come to teach that the eternal light was not to come in the future, that it lay unseen in the inner man; that they should seek after love, humility, and justice and that joy should not be banished from the heart. Peace should be in the soul—an inner peace which storms will not touch. Here in this blessed land, the Master had steadily sowed the golden seed speaking to everyone who approached him seeking his word. He seemed never to tire. Although Judas firmly believed that the seed would form into ears, he wondered whether the harvest would ever be brought to the storehouse. For the Master always went on without making secure the ties binding the faithful to him. Judas feared the kingdom on earth would never have a solid foundation.

The Master was still honored by a special seat in the synagogue and sometimes he was asked to read the Law or to preach. But the spies from Jerusalem always made their appearance and the Pharisees and other adversaries showed their opposition, whether active or passive. Judas also observed, to his dismay, that the number of serious listeners decreased. Fewer came to learn, and more came to pose ensnaring questions. Seldom was a point of spiritual interest raised. It was mostly narrow-minded quibbling about breaking the sabbath and other regulations. In this narrowing circle of fault-finders the Master's inspired word fell like the manna from heaven. Even when the golden seed had not fallen on the bare rock would it not still be stifled by the weeds? It was becoming more and more difficult to soften the bitter mood of their opponents. Only the simple listened with attention to the parables of the Master, and they went away satisfied.

After a long and bitter argument between the Master and a group of adversaries, Philip said to Judas, "They will never desist. The more so because from their point of view they are apparently right." Judas, horrified, asked how Philip could say they were right, even in appearance. Philip answered that they had no light to see by, and driven by self-interest they defended their cause with honest conviction. God's love and mercy were kept secret from them, and in their pride they believed only in their own perfection. They couldn't understand the way the Master honored the holy sabbath. They only saw him transgressing the regulations. They watered their animals on the sabbath but they criticized the Master when he healed a man on that day. They had no love toward others, and, neither wise nor free, they were slaves entangled in their own formalities. "Will there never be an end to their lies and evil intentions?" Judas asked desperately. Philip answered that lies would increase, and finally the Master's enemies would resort to violence.

"We will prevent them from using violence," Judas exclaimed, "if necessary by force."

Philip shook his head. "The clear water of God's truth can only be kept pure in peace." Judas kept silent. Painful thoughts plagued him. The Master was spied upon at meals and festivities in Capernaum and Magdala, in Perea and even in Bethany, always with the purpose of misusing his words. Sometimes Judas lost all hope of a future for the kingdom.

When Philip and Judas returned it was time for the noon meal. No sooner were they seated than John warned the Master that again the messengers from Jerusalem had come. The first who entered, Judas saw, was the tall Pharisee he had seen with the adulterous woman in the temple. The Master had just finished breaking the bread and was passing it to the followers. He greeted the men from Jerusalem and invited them to sit down. But they preferred to remain standing. In that way, they believed, they did not lower themselves to fellowship with the Nazarene and his followers who were seated. Silently the disciples received their bread. Some of them, however, had taken their places without washing their hands. The tall Pharisee arrogantly asked the Master, "Why do your disciples transgress the traditions of the elders by eating bread with unwashed hands?"

The Master smiled saying. "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?" He spoke in a soft voice, but to Judas it seemed a mighty trumpet of justice. Their silence was involuntary confirmation. Again the Master spoke, this time in stern words, saying Isaiah had said of them that they worshiped the Lord with their lips, not with their hearts. Then he addressed the crowd who had come in silently, and gave them to understand that it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a man, but what comes out of the mouth, coming forth from the heart. In speaking of the heart, Jesus meant the will, Judas reflected, and he saw the evil will of their adversaries who were seeking false witness and slander to use against the Master. Again Jesus said that to eat with unwashed hands did not defile a man.

The faces of the Pharisees reflected their fury. Was it not necessary to wash hands before meals? So they, the faithful, who sometimes ran up to four miles to get water to wash themselves, were merely fools? And their numerous prayers while scouring themselves made no sense? Not washing the hands was as great a sin as killing a man.

John asked the Master in a whisper whether he knew that the Pharisees were offended by his words. The Master answered that every plant his heavenly Father had not planted would be rooted up, that if the blind lead the blind both would fall into the ditch.

Judas watched the Pharisees and the scribes in their pent-up fury. Hostile, tense, unreceptive to any teaching, they drew back like fighters on the watch for the chance to return a blow. But they knew they were powerless against the Master. Jesus spoke of hearts full of hypocrisy and iniquity. The sunlight fell on his head, and it seemed to Judas that God's angels were about him. Their opponents stood in the dark, for their self-love was without any light of charity. They were out to destroy all who dared to assail their regulations, convinced of their own righteousness. And Judas saw that the Master was not only the chosen messenger of the truth of God, but also the light that conquers the darkness. But, he wondered, for how long?

14

One morning Judas was in the bazaar of Bethsaida making purchases when suddenly Dulachio's steward stood before him. Radiant with happiness the man told him that his little son was completely recovered. Judas should come and see him. With some hesitation he added also that Dulachio, his master, was anxious to talk to Judas. Dulachio was not really sick, the steward said, but he was old. And how could he be feeling well, leading the life he did! Dulachio also had heard of the preacher of Nazareth who called back the dead, and he hoped that his follower could restore the strength of his youth by miraculous power.

Judas shook his head. Dulachio should believe in the Lord and live in wisdom, he said. But the steward said his master was convinced that he was very wise. He had bought even the throne of Solomon (a false one, naturally) and some beautifully written scrolls proving he was Solomon's descendant. Like that great king he had indeed gathered the riches of the earth. Yet, in the midst of all this splendor Dulachio was sick with fear at the thought of his approaching death. He had even ordered an enormous cenotaph in marble to glorify him to eternity. Judas said he could not help Dulachio, but he promised to come and do whatever was possible for the child that evening.

The steward was waiting that evening in front of the palace and as Judas arrived they entered through the main entrance. To show Judas the wonders of the palace, the steward led him first through a forecourt where a great many parrots were making a terrible noise. "Enjoy the day, enjoy the day," a big white bird screamed, and a dignified cockatoo crowned with a handsome crest peered with its small eyes at Judas and cried, "Don't drink too much," while a red one croaked over and over, "Go to the devil!" In spite of himself Judas laughed. Over a narrow bridge they crossed a second court where, between artificial rocks, three large lizards with monstrous heads were tearing bloody tatters of flesh from a dead donkey. Dragons from the underworld, Judas thought, but the steward said they had been brought from a far-off eastern isle.

Entering the third court he warned Judas to walk on the path in the middle. "On both sides are panthers and leopards on silver chains. This path between the wild beasts is an image of my master's path of life," the steward said. "But Dulachio himself always boasts that his life has been one great struggle with ruthless foes, and after he had destroyed them all, the Lord rewarded him with all the riches of the earth." Then, opening another gate, the steward said with contempt that they were about to enter the hall of self-glorification. Here, carved out in the marble walls, Judas saw scenes depicting Dulachio's estates and palaces in Greece and Egypt and his merchant vessels plowing the high seas. Plagued by the question as to why the Almighty had allowed such a fool to gather all these riches, Judas followed the steward into a hall of pink marble where he saw a kind of throne made of ivory with stone eagles at its foot—Dulachio's "throne of King Solomon." Judas remarked, "King Solomon had an ivory throne covered with gold and lions at each side of its steps, not eagles."

"So it is," the steward said. "King Solomon was wise, yet he lost a great part of his kingdom, but Dulachio, a fool, is steadily growing richer and mightier."

At this moment a curtain was pushed aside and an old, fat man came staggering in. He was very drunk. Searchingly he looked at Judas then took him by the arm and exclaimed, "The red follower, the man with miraculous powers! Welcome! Do you know what I want to do? I will make you rich, rich! Your Master calls back the dead. But I, I'm still alive, though I'm old. My sickness is my age and you must cure me. You must make me young again." An anxious expression came on his withered face. "Give me a potion, a miraculous herb or show me a spring where I can drink and be young again. I don't want to die. I want to live forever."

"Come to us, Sir, and listen to the word of our Master," Judas said earnestly.

"Words? Listen to words? But I'm a man of action. Only actions have brought me luck, and for actions the strength of youth is necessary. Once I was strong. I grabbed all I wanted: gold, women, pleasures. I kicked away all that was useless to me. Everything I touched turned into gold and increased my power. And now I don't want to grow old and weak. I want to be as strong as I was when I was a woodsman felling trees and seeing the golden sun glittering on my axe. Give me a remedy, a miraculous potion, something, and I'll make you rich."

Judas looked with compassion at the man's anxious face and said again, "I cannot help you. If you don't want to listen to my Master you should go back to your woods. By living soberly and reading in the Torah you should try to find the true gold."

"The true gold? Is there better gold than I possess? Back to the woods, I, King Dulachio?"

"Cut down your trees," Judas said severely, "make your woods into fertile fields and meadows and give these to your freed slaves, and your name will live forever."

Confused thoughts were crossing Dulachio's mind, for suddenly he asked, "Can I take my parrots with me?"

"No men and no birds who cry. 'Go to the devil'," Judas said.

"But they speak words. And didn't you say I must believe in words?"

"Your birds speak words, but they don't think. They scream instead of singing like the birds in the woods."

Dulachio shook his head. "I don't understand you, miracle-man," he said. "But you may still express your wish, and I will fulfil it now, tomorrow, or whenever you want. But save me if you can. Now I've got to go. They're waiting for me." Dulachio staggered back to the banquet hall.

Silently the steward took Judas to the room of his son who was sleeping. Judas didn't want the child to be awakened. Gazing at his pale but peaceful face he felt a great joy. The Lord had been merciful to him.

Before leading Judas out of the palace the steward said he wanted to show him a kind of false paradise, and took him to his own room next to the banquet hall. Putting out the lamp he opened a small hatch in the wall looking out on the brightly lighted hall. Loud voices, laughter and music penetrated the steward's room together with the smell of roast meat and wine. Judas saw a boisterous company with many women lying at full length on the triclinia. In the middle of the hall was a large table with three big platters on which lay a whole roasted deer, a small calf, and a pig. Two fountains, one of white and the other of red wine, splashed down in marble basins. From here, the steward said, he always kept an eye on what was going on, so that he could intervene when a quarrel started up after too much drinking. He offered a glass of wine to Judas who refused, however, for he wanted no part of this feast.

Dulachio, seated on another ivory throne, told the carver to begin his task. The men raised a huge fork and knife and cut a circle on the crisp belly of the roasted pig. A cluster of sausages fell down on a silver platter held ready by two slaves.

Then, Dulachio said, "I have a surprise. The despised pig will bring forth a white dove. And whoever will bring the dove, dead or alive, to me, will receive a hundred argurions."

Laughing and pushing each other aside, the guests stood ready for the hunt. Cassio, the fat centurion, who had always preferred food and wine to fighting, courageously drew his sword and raised it above his head. "I will split it in two," he shouted.

"You are not allowed to catch the dove before it has freely flown out," Dulachio said.

The carver was feeling with his hands inside the pig. Then, he made a movement with his hand and out flew a white dove, its wings tipped with gold. Avoiding Cassio's sword, it alighted on the head of a statue. A young man aimed at it with a wine cup, but in vain, for the bird flew to the table. A woman snatched at it, but it left only a feather in her hand. The hundred argurions fluttered away. The hunt went on. The dove lit on the basin with white wine. Avoiding many grabbing hands it disappeared under the table. Cassio dived down wildly poking with his sword. A woman screamed. Cassio's sword had touched her leg and she started crying loudly. All screamed, yelled, fought and kicked. A youth dashed against the slave with the platter of sausages who was desperately trying to make his way through the confusion. The platter turned over, and an avalanche of sausages fell on the round head of Cassio who had just come out from under the table. Everyone roared with laughter. The slave, afraid of Cassio's sword, fled. As Cassio, cursing furiously, tore off the clusters of hot sausages a woman maliciously turned a dish of olives over his head, saying, "Olives go very well with sausages."

At this moment, a young girl, almost a child, was pulled from under the table. In her small hands she held the white dove with the golden wings. She looked around fearfully.

"Where do you come from? Who are you?" Dulachio asked.

"I'm Alita, one of the new Greek slaves, Sir," the girl said in a timorous voice.

"She is as beautiful as Venus herself," a young Roman said. "Give her to me, Dulachio."

Dulachio did not hear him. "Friends," he said, "a slave girl has caught the dove. Without permission she took part in the hunt. What must I do now with her and the dove?" He looked helpless.

"I only wanted to save my pretty dove," the slave girl stammered. Holding the dove to her breast she looked at Dulachio, her eyes big with fear. She was slender and graceful as she stood there, her hair falling in black curls on her bare shoulders, awaiting the word that would determine her fate. Judas saw her eyes, dark and searching, looking at Dulachio. In reply to Dulachio's rude question whether she was still a virgin she nodded shyly.

Cassio asked his host, "Give the girl to me."

But Dulachio said, "Only my guests should decide on this." And he beckoned his young friend Lebonius, famous for his eloquence, to make an oration.

Lebonius began, saying, "You all know about the might of King Dulachio. He gives gold and joys to his subjects, his friends. Unlike other kings, he puts no burdens on their shoulders." Pointing to the young Alita, he continued, "She is as beautiful as a king's daughter. The only burden Fortuna has put on her is a white dove with golden wings and a hundred argurions. Nobody should be afraid to leave the dove to Alita, for Dulachio will surely give all of us many splendid presents. Are not his riches inexhaustible? Vessels from India have brought gold-embroidered garments from the sacred land of the Hindus, and caravans of camels loaded with silver chests have arrived from the shores of the Arabian seas with white luminous pearls. And he, the wise descendant of King Solomon, who even fetched the dragons from the underworld, wants his guests also to be generous. Only one question I, Lebonius, wish to ask: does King Dulachio desire the beauteous Alita for himself?"

Dulachio's tired gaze rested upon the girl's face, then glided over her slender figure. Judas saw her eyes wide with fear. But Dulachio said negligently, "I don't want her."

"Friends," Lebonius said, raising his voice, "behold the wisdom of King Dulachio who can look on that which is beautiful without coveting it. Fortuna indeed has smiled on this child who wanted to save her white dove, the symbol of her innocence. King Dulachio should now bow down before Fortuna who has favored him his whole life."

Dulachio smiled and said kindly, "Alita, my child, what do you desire?"

"Freedom," Lebonius whispered to her.

"My freedom, King Dulachio, my freedom," the girl said in a trembling voice.

One of the guests who had drunk too much said querulously, "King Dulachio. Ha! ha! He is no king and his palace is an evil house."

"Away with the villain," shouted Cassio who at last found an opportunity to give vent to his irritation, and prodding the man's tunic with his sword, he chased him out.

Alita stood before Dulachio. A man in a black garment with a withered face and lustreless eyes approached Dulachio.

"He is the builder of Dulachio's cenotaph," the steward said to Judas.

In a croaking voice the man said to Dulachio that all his guests had the same desire; Alita, and a nuptial couch with a statue of Aphrodite at the right, Venus at the left and Alita, as the bride, in the middle. His friends cheered him noisily as he added with a grin that she could keep her dove of innocence with her.

Judas who had seen the fear on the girl's face sprang up and started to run to the banquet hall, but the steward held him back.

Lebonius took up Alita's defense. Pointing to the man in black, he said, "A king doesn't listen to a vulture, to the dark owl of death, who wants to dishonor him." The other tried to speak, but Lebonius continued, "Other kings sometimes give bread, wine and games to their people: stale bread, sour wine, and bad games. But our king gives us roasts, fountains of wine, and the most famous games in the arena of Bethsaida. He is a true king who will decide now on young Alita's fate."

Dulachio, flattered, smiled with joy. "I give Alita her freedom, the dove, and the hundred argurions," he said hoarsely. "Bring me the liberty cap."

A slave ran up with the Phrygian cap. The girl knelt down, her body trembling. Then Dulachio with his thick fingers put the red cap on her head saying she was free. Judas sighed as the girl, avoiding all rough and eager hands, ran out of the hall, her dove in her hands. Without casting another glance through the hatch, Judas said he wanted to go now.

As the steward saw Judas to the gate, he said, smiling apologetically, "You see, my lord, my master is really not an evil man, only vain and foolish. When he has drunk too much he always wants to proclaim his own wisdom and glory from his throne of Solomon. And then, not only does he trip over his words, but as often as not he tumbles down from his throne. Poor King Dulachio."

15

After a troubled sleep Judas went to the window and looked out. The horizon was getting light. As he stood there a long flight of cranes, dark against the sky, winged their way into the new day. He noiselessly crossed the room where John, James, and Peter were still asleep. For a moment he gazed at John on whose face was an expression of celestial peace. Opening his eyes John said softly, "May your task be easy, Judas, and your day peaceful."

Judas thanked him in a whisper and went on, a little embarrassed at having disturbed him. John and James were sons of a well-to-do house, for their father owned a fishing boat with a hired crew. Therefore Judas, as a keeper of the purse, sometimes asked advice from James who knew that he discharged his duties conscientiously. Sometimes James laughed at the opposition the spontaneous Peter showed to what he regarded as Judas' avarice. If Peter kept the purse a stream of money would have poured from it, whereas Judas held the purse strings tight. One day when Peter said that Judas was acting as if the money belonged to him, Judas retorted that the reason he calculated so sharply was that the money, indeed, did not belong to him, but rather to their community and to the poor who might have need of it.

Later that morning Peter asked Judas to take a walk with him by the sea. The shores and the water lay still in a thin silvery haze. As they watched the small ships Judas saw a man coming toward them in a great hurry. It was the Tobhin Shekalim, the toll gatherer for the temple. Judas cast a searching look at him, but Peter bade the man speak.

The toll gatherer slyly sized up both the disciples. Then he asked Peter politely, "Does your Master not pay tribute?"

He evidently meant the half-shekel paid by every Jew as a tax to the temple. Judas had the money in his purse, and if Peter said "yes" he would give it. But in doing so, he feared, he might harm the Master's prestige, for no rabbi was ever required to pay tribute. Touching Peter's arm he said, "Why has this money not been asked for in the month of Adar, as is customary?"

The toll gatherer waited. In a whisper Judas added that the Master was exempt of redemption money, as was every other rabbi. But Peter paid no attention and, perhaps rebelling against what he considered Judas' stinginess, he said with a generous gesture, "Yes, my Master will pay."

The man thanked Peter and went away, seemingly satisfied with the promise.

Judas reminded Peter of a quarrel, a short time before, between the Pharisees and Sadducees over the question of whether the payments to the temple were voluntary or compulsory. But Peter said it didn't matter, for in both instances his answer had been right.

"I certainly would have refused the money," Judas said gloomily.

"Money, always money." Peter exclaimed.

Judas suppressed his anger. "If the gift of the Master is voluntary," he said, "the Master himself should decide it."

"You would have done better to pay the half-shekel without delay as proof of the Master's willingness to keep up the temple. You keep your purse strings tied too long."

Judas kept silent, reflecting how he must report the incident to the Master. At home the Master welcomed them with a friendly word. To their astonishment, he asked Peter of whom the kings of the earth took tribute—of their own children or of strangers?

Peter answered, "Of strangers."

"Then are the children free," the Master said. Judas rejoiced that he had been right. But to his dismay the Master said Peter should pay one stater for them. Instead of disavowing the promise given by Peter, as Judas had hoped, the Master told Peter to go to the sea. In the mouth of the first fish he caught, he would find a piece of money. He was to take it and give it to the tax collector.

Judas was confused. Instinctively he reached for his purse as if to take out the money. But the Master glanced at him kindly, understanding his dilemma. Then Judas knew that the miracle of the fish must take place to bear witness to the Master's kingship. He himself, he reflected, never seemed able to show true generosity and submission; there was always a hidden opposition in him, inevitably followed by some humiliation. In his heart he did not like the Master's gentle way of showing to the impetuous Peter the dilemma in which his hasty answer had placed Him, for Judas wanted the plain truth and a severe judgment.

To the west of Jericho Judas and Philip were following a stony path in the wilderness. It was overgrown with thistles and thorny weeds covered with a grey veil of dust. No trees, no flower grew anywhere, nowhere a cool spring or the murmur of a brook. Bare, high mountain ridges, their sheer rock walls like threatening guardians, seemed to exclude all life. The heat was scorching and Judas was blinded by the reflection of the light on the white cliffs. Never had he seen such a desolate landscape.

Philip stopped. Pointing to a high peak he said, "That is the place where the Master stayed for forty days." Judas looked at the peak and the dark abyss beneath it, and shuddered. Could the eternal treasures be hidden there, behind this mountain chain? And had the Master been guided from the Jordan to this wilderness that he might see, like the prophets, the mighty spectacle of divine revelations? In this wilderness illusions couldn't last, Judas thought, and words of wisdom would be lost without an echo, as good seed dries up on bare limestone. Here the Master had fought the powers of darkness. "Did the Master, sunk in prayer and fasting like a hermit, perhaps see the visions of his own mind?" Judas asked Philip.

"Here all the powers of heaven and earth were revealed to him," said Philip, "and he was in constant combat with the powers of evil, resisting the severest temptations. Here he shook off his chains, and with the celestial trumpets sounding and the singing of heavenly voices he saw in clear letters the divine truth before him."

Judas stood silent, gazing at the peak blinding white in the sunlight. Turning to Philip he asked, "Were hunger and suffering truly necessary to elevate the Master?"

"How can you doubt that, Judas?" Philip said startled. "Has not the Master, since that time, always sought to strengthen our souls and minds rather than our bodies?"

As they walked on Judas' gaze fell on a stone in the shape of a loaf. Philip also saw it, and remarked, "With such a stone the devil tried to tempt the Master after forty days of fasting, saying that if he were the Son of God he could turn this stone into bread."

"But why this temptation?" Judas exclaimed. "When our people were hungry in the desert the Lord gave them manna, the heavenly bread. When Hagar almost fainted from thirst did not the angel show her the fountain of Beer-lahai-roy? And would it really have been a sin had the Master changed these stones into bread, that he might be filled on the fortieth day of his fast?"

"If this miracle had taken place through the instigation of Satan, for the sake of the flesh, the kingdom would have been destroyed," said Philip, "the light would have been extinguished."

"I do not agree," Judas said sullenly. "Aren't all men striving for bread and wine?"

"Yes," said Philip, "but that which is obtained through the instigation of Satan is no real gain, Judas. The stones must remain stones if God doesn't want them changed into bread."

Silently they walked on among the thistles and stones till at last they came to a small spring near a lonely tree. There they broke bread and ate their fruit. As they were resting Judas reminded Philip of the wedding where the Master, who would not change a stone into bread, had changed water into wine.

"The master did not desire to drink wine, but we had forgotten to bring provisions with us to the wedding feast," Philip said. "The Master loved the family, and he saw how worried the bridegroom was because he had not enough wine for his guests. So the Master had the pots of water brought to him, and the miracle happened. The water was changed into wine and at the same time all worries were changed into joy. It was like a covenant between the Master and the souls of the simple. The Master spoke a few words, and nobody doubted that he gave them the most glorious wine of the kingdom of God."

Philip told everything in such a beautiful way, Judas thought. Yet how could this have taken place? Why didn't the Master repeat this miracle till all the people were at his feet? Then the wedding! How often he had been at weddings. There was always too much drinking, and the guests were rough and suggestive. Suddenly he remembered a girl who had tried to persuade him to go with her into a dark garden. Her face had been pale with desire. Yet he had resisted her. No, nothing was quite as Philip imagined it.

Mary of Magdala seldom laughed unrestrainedly. But once Brodhe had told her an amusing story, and Mary burst out laughing. Judas could not forget her laughter and the whole day the sound was in his ears. Against his will his thoughts were of her, and when he saw her this spring he could not keep his eyes off her face. A great restlessness seized him, a confusion alternating with a burning passion.

The Syrian spring had come in its full luxuriance. Judas' couch was near a high open window where the strong fragrance of night-blooming flowers floated in. Gazing at the stars sparkling in the wide firmament he had fallen asleep. In the middle of the night, still asleep, he arose. In his dream he felt an unknown power taking him away in a boat on a silver stream. Before him rose a white temple. He was not aware that he was walking in a stream of moonlight to the door of the room where the women slept. He went to the temple of his dream, and he recognized the figure of Mary standing at the gate, beckoning him. Her eyes were fixed on him. And he was the bridegroom approaching the bride. He saw her wavy hair, fine as spun gold, and sensed the fragrance of nard about her. Red as the roses of Sharon, her lips were awaiting his kiss.

Suddenly a stern voice broke in, "What are you looking for, Judas?"

With a shock Judas awoke. He did not know where he was or who had called him. Looking confusedly about him he saw in the pale moonlight Simon Peter's angry face. He had risen from his couch. "Where am I? What's the matter?" Judas stammered.

"You were sneaking off to the rooms of the women, and I ask you what do you seek there?" Peter said.

"I?" Judas was now entirely awake.

"When desires are not pure they burn like the flames of hell. Go now, Judas," Peter scolded.

Judas fell silent. He went back to his couch, and for hours he lay sleepless, anxious thoughts plaguing him as he stared at the moonlight. In him were powers he was unable to control, he reflected. Even when the light of dawn had come, dispelling all fanciful thoughts, he still felt a heavy burden on his soul. No longer did he think of the accusing voice of Peter who, by reprimanding him, had protected him from evil. What really oppressed him was that he, a strong man seeking the good with his whole heart, was driven in ways he did not want to go by powers strange to him. In his restlessness he walked out in the early morning breeze, and went to a small park where he sat down near the splashing spray of a fountain. Again the smiling image of Mary rose before him. And again he was completely possessed by his longing for her. He saw himself walking with her in the vineyard in Kerioth, in the spring. The vines were blooming and the pomegranates, too. He smelled the flowers growing on the rocky walls. But he did not think of his father and mother, or of Mary's entry as a bride in their house, or of the cedar and acacia trees planted for his wedding canopy. For was his love not above all bonds? His love was as exalted and lofty as that which was celebrated in the Song of Songs.

Philip, passing through the park, was the first to greet Judas next morning. He knew what had happened during the night and in his concern he had gone out to see what had become of Judas. Seeing that Judas was not in a mood to talk to him, Philip went on. The true light had not yet penetrated Judas' mind, he thought. He was like a fig tree overloaded with fruit. Storms could come and tear the fruit off. Already Philip saw the storm raging about the disciple's head, wildly twisting his locks, making them look like red snakes. Walking through the bright morning, he pondered how he could bring peace to the heart of Judas Iscariot.

Judas wandered restlessly through the park for some time. Then he sat down again in the shadow of a sycomore. He would read in the Torah to find peace, for the word of God surely was a pure stream of truth, a cure for all wounds. Unrolling a small scroll he often carried with him, his eye fell on the story of Amnon, the son of King David, who loved Tamar, his sister, with a violent and sinful passion. Amnon was so depressed that he fell sick, for Tamar was beautiful beyond comparison. He went for advice to Jonadab, a crafty man, who asked him why he got leaner from day to day. If Amnon would tell him, Jonadab would make him healthy again. Then Amnon said he loved Tamar and Jonadab told him to pretend to be sick and ask his father to let Tamar feed him. So Amnon lay down and pretended to be sick. King David himself came to him and later he sent Tamar. She baked the cakes, but he refused to eat. He ordered everyone out of the room, and as Tamar brought the food to him he took hold of her suddenly and told her to lie with him. She pleaded with him not to force her, trembling for his sake. But he forced her to lie with him. Then Amnon hated her, and drove her out, ordering his servant to bolt the door after her.

Judas read and reread these lines, but he failed to understand their meaning. He failed to find the comfort he was seeking. In despair he stared at the ground. Why was it he had found only deceit, depravity, and violence in the Holy Book? This Jonadab who was called a crafty man could be no other than Satan himself who had ruined Amnon and Tamar. The secret power of Satan had crept into the Torah. Rabbi Emmanuel, he remembered, had said that in its every word lay a deeply hidden truth. Judas, of course, failed to understand it. Looking up he saw Matthew coming toward him. With a vague feeling of embarrassment he remembered Matthew had been a publican. Matthew said kindly that it was good at the light of dawn to seek also the light of Torah.

"In seeking the light I only found darkness," Judas complained.

Matthew looked at him with compassion. But Judas, who didn't want to speak of Amnon said, "Matthew, why was Rahab of Jericho, a sinful woman, chosen by the Lord to become the ancestress of King David?"

Matthew thought a moment. "Jesse was the father of King David and the grandson of Rahab of Jericho, wasn't it so?" he said.

"Rahab was an evil woman," Judas said, harshly. "She harbored the spy although she knew that her whole people to the last man, woman and child would be killed. How could Rahab be rewarded by the Almighty?"

"Judas, how can you speak like this of the ancestress of King David from whom our Master is descended?"

Judas interrupted him. "Do not say that, Matthew. It might reflect on our Master."

Matthew looked in consternation at Judas. "You cannot judge those who were chosen by the Lord. Would you dare to be angry with our Master because, above all women, he chose Mary to follow him? Was it necessary therefore that her life be entirely without sin? For now, surely, she is a queen wrapped in white garments with the lilies of purity in her hands. What is your answer, Judas?"

Judas flushed with embarrassment. What could he answer, he who always, awake or asleep, saw the image of Mary before him? What was he himself but a sinner? He heard Matthew speaking of the Lord's wisdom and goodness and nodded absent-mindedly. He felt sick with passion like Amnon, and Mary was affectionate like a sister. When Matthew had walked away he looked again at the story of Amnon. He read that Tamar, about to be forced by Amnon, had told him he should talk to the king who would not withhold her from him. In his overexcited imagination it seemed to Judas that Mary spoke these words to him. Had he then found the light in the Torah, at last? Matthew had only talked and talked. To Jonadab Judas would surely have listened more attentively, Jonadab who was perhaps Satan himself. As he walked slowly away his mind was full of doubts. He even mistrusted himself.

Jesus of Nazareth went from Galilee to Judea and Perea and during this journey he was to call seventy more followers. He had chosen a hill with a wide view over the low lands to the east and west, and there his adherents were to gather. The day before, Judas had told the Master that Romelo, the gladiator, now completely recovered from the wound inflicted by a killer of the arena, was like a man building on a rock, so that neither wind nor water could sweep away his works. With zeal and self-sacrifice he helped his fellowmen, never passing judgments on them. As he talked, Judas noticed that the Master knew all this already, and he went away to prepare Romelo.

When Romelo heard of it he shook his head dubiously, and said he was only a simple man. The Master had power over spirits and devils, over sickness and death. But he had killed so many with his sword, how could *he* be chosen? He would be only too happy to help the sick by calling the disciples to heal them. He could take care of the Master's comfort, seeing that he always rested on clean linen, that the host at whose table he sat served clean food, and that there was peace under his roof. But Judas insisted that Romelo be among the adherents from whose midst the Master would call the seventy, so that his name would be inscribed in the heavens. Then the former gladiator said he would do everything the Master charged him to do.

When the seventy were chosen Romelo was among them and he heard the Master's words, "Take my yoke upon you, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Thus Romelo began his service with the Master.

In the following months Romelo was sent in advance to the villages, and wherever he went, the Master was given a welcome. One day he had again succeeded in finding in a small town a home worthy of the Master and his disciples, but something happened that gave him cause for concern. As he was following the Master through the crowd, he saw a Pharisee accost Jesus. Although it was time for the midday meal the Pharisee invited the Master only for a small breakfast, for which it was too late. The Master did not refuse, although he must have seen through the design. Romelo approached and whispered to him that in this house he would not find any poor to whom he could give his blessing. The master thanked Romelo with a smile. Nevertheless he went with the Pharisee. As he entered the house he was met with cold threatening faces.

Romelo had remained standing at the entrance of the reception room. He was worried. If there were only one of the disciples present, he thought, he would feel better—Peter, for instance, who in his zeal was like a shield for his Master, or John, who always surrounded him with loving care. But they were all sitting lightheartedly at dinner in the friendly house where they were staying. He resolved to go and call one of them. As he entered the room where they were, Judas, seeing Romelo's anxiety, immediately rose and accompanied him outside.

"Our Master has gone into a hostile house, alone, among the mighty," Romelo said, concerned.

"For the midday meal?" Judas asked.

"Not a real meal. That will be eaten later, when they have humiliated him and driven him out. Come quickly."

They hurried off to the house of the Pharisee and watched the dining-hall from the entrance. Judas watched the host give the other Pharisees, the lawyers, and the scribes the opportunity to interrogate Jesus. Judas was sure that these ill-disposed men would pour out their venom to gratify their frustrated hatred of the Master.

Judas heard the Master's reproachful words about the contempt of virtue; about hypocrisy and the ambitions of his opponents; their worldly desire to be the first and their feigned piety. Judas saw a member of the lawyer's guild rise from his seat, to put a quick end to the stream of words of the young prophet. When the lawyer said that the Nazarene reviled the lawyers, Judas knew that now, inevitably, the rupture with the mighty would follow.

The Master's voice was strong and steady as he addressed the lawyers in reproachful words. Those around Jesus dropped their masks of polite aloofness. Their fury mounted, and scribes and Pharisees, suddenly united, surrounded Jesus, shouting, threatening him with their fists, their faces distorted by hatred. Once the Master had walked on the waves, conquering the forces of nature, Judas reflected. But more dangerous were these men with the faces of predatory animals. He saw the Master signal that he wished to leave, and together with Romelo, Judas stepped forward to accompany him outside. The sight of the two tall men caused the noisy group to make way. Judas noticed that men who understood nothing of the sublime power of the Master fearfully shrank from the strong arms of his simple followers.

16

Autumn had come to Galilee. The Master stayed with his disciples at Capernaum whence he sent them out in all directions. Judas was to go with Peter this time, but Peter wanted to visit his sick mother-in-law. Judas, too, longed to visit his parents whom he had not seen since he had left Kerioth. They were coming to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles and Judas would like to meet them there instead of going on a mission. With kind words the Master gave his permission, but he did not say whether he himself would go to Jerusalem.

As Judas left the room the Master's two brothers entered, and as he made his bundle for the journey he could hear their sharp voices. Jesus should go into Judea, they said. He should not hide himself in fear, but make himself known openly. But Judas heard him answer that he would not go to this feast for his time had not yet come.

As Judas started on his way a light breeze was blowing and the sky was blue. Gaily clad, a carved staff in his hand, he joined a group of young pilgrims who went on their way singing and chatting cheerfully. The Feast of Ingathering, originally a commemoration of the passage of their forebears through the wilderness, had long since become a joyous harvest feast. It was all the more joyous because the Day of Atonement, four days earlier, was a day of expiation for the sins of the people. Thus they were all filled with happy thoughts.

Judas made friends with an old man who treated him with respect for he was a good friend of Simon Peter. Together they bought the lulab, a palm shoot entwined with willow and myrtle branches, and also the citron, objects they needed for the feast. The infectious good spirits of the pilgrims enveloped Judas, and he no longer uneasily asked himself whether the Master would come to Jerusalem or not.

With the old man he sat down to rest and eat a little way from the road. The trees and bushes were aflame with the bright colors of autumn, red apples hung on the trees and heavy clusters of grapes on the vines. The smell of young wine was in the air. Out of a small house came an old woman with two cups of wine, which she offered them. She would not go to the feast, she said, because she was too old now, but she wished them a happy journey. A group of youthful pilgrims passed by singing the old song of the girl who was waiting at the fountain for her lover. As he walked on Judas hummed the tune and thought of Mary, and although the autumn was all about him he could have sung like a bird in the springtime.

A young girl who knew the old man asked him quietly who this stranger was with the red hair and the blue eyes. When she heard he was a follower of the prophet of Nazareth she looked at Judas with curiosity. The old man asked her to stay with them, for it was late and many had halted already for the night. In a hamlet Judas bought a torch that threw fantastic shadows on the road. He plucked some ripe figs for the girl and every time he gave her one his hand touched hers, a soft girl's hand.

"The more figs, the more kisses tomorrow at the feast," the old man teased.

Judas took only one of the figs she proffered him. She laughed and asked why he was so afraid? He looked at her in the light of the torch. There was something familiar about her, but just what he could not tell. Several times he felt her dark eyes resting on him in an innocent yet searching gaze. Then he realized that she reminded him of his mother and he put his arm about her shoulder. But as she drew closer to him, he let go of her, for suddenly the image of Mary had arisen before him. It was to her that he belonged.

That night he shared with the old man the succoth, a cabin built of olive greens, cedar twigs, and myrtle. The girl had the succoth next to them. All night many of the pilgrims continued to sing. As Judas finally fell to sleep he saw himself, a bridegroom, entering a room where Mary was waiting for him. She was sleeping. A bird was singing and he was afraid it would waken Mary. But the bird went on singing louder and louder. He awoke, and through a hatch in the wall of leaves he saw the old man gazing at him. The girl had left, he said, and yet Judas had given her the figs as a token that he would go with her to the feast that evening.

Within the gates of Jerusalem Judas said goodbye to the old man. In his longing to see his parents he hurried to the friend's house where they were staying. Cyborea was radiant with happiness, and Simon gave him a warm welcome. His son was much changed, he saw. His youthful impetuosity had disappeared, he seemed more tranquil. There was a new expression in his eyes as if he had suffered a great deal. And realizing that Judas surely must have had many disappointments, he said warmly that he had sorely missed his son and faithful steward. The girls of Kerioth and their acacia trees had evidently no attraction for him as yet. Judas, avoiding this subject, said candidly that he had very often been home-sick for his parents and his friends, the shepherds and Arisio.

Their host invited them to sit down at the table. Pitchers with wine and cool water stood ready and the meat, bread, and charoseth, cheese, and fruit were served. During the conversation the host remarked that every day the Sanhedrin took a more severe stand against the preacher of Nazareth. Never had he been recognized as a rabbi by the priests, because he was a follower neither of Hillel nor of Shammai. In the beginning, it was true, he had won over many simple people, but he was losing more and more adherents in Jerusalem. Although Judas knew these facts it seemed as if a shadow had fallen on the bright room, and he was relieved when the meal was finished and they went together to the temple.

Cyborea walked proudly next to Judas. She was happy to have him near her although she, too, found her son much changed. Something new had formed in his soul, she thought. The lonesome, unapproachable young man of Kerioth now had a natural easy manner. He seemed happier, although she thought she detected now and then a pained expression in his eyes. With her old tenderness she put her hand in his.

As they entered the first court of the temple they saw a crowd around a preacher. To his consternation Judas saw that it was his Master, alone, without any of the disciples. He heard His words, "Has not Moses given the law? Yet none of you keep the law?" And of a sudden he heard Jesus ask why they were planning to kill him. A bystander asked, "Who is trying to kill him?" Judas started to push through the crowd to stand by his Master and protect him. But he reflected the Master must certainly have had good reasons to come here without any of his followers. So Judas went back to his parents and listened intently. He had made a man whole on the sabbath, the Master said, and they were angry at him. Admonishing the crowd he said that they should not judge according to the appearance, but judge righteously. Judas heard a man behind him ask if this was not the prophet they sought to kill? But then some contradiction arose among the crowd. Could he be the Messiah? No, for they knew where he came from, but when the Messiah came no man would know whence he came. As if the Master had heard these discussions he said loudly that they knew who he was and where he came from and that he was sent by One whom they did not know.

Astonishment was visible on many faces and also hatred and disappointment. A man cautioned his neighbor not to show approval, for the spies of the Sanhedrin reported everything. Judas looked anxiously at Cyborea, but she was absorbed in the Master's words. In her singleness of heart she said, "He could well be an angel who has descended to earth."

Again he caught the voice of Jesus, saying that he would be with them a little while yet and then he would go unto Him who had sent him.

"The Master is speaking of his death again," Judas whispered to his father. Simon said reproachfully that the disciples should protect him more effectively. Then nobody would dare to lay hands on him. Judas kept silent. Yes, inevitably, he knew, a catastrophe would happen, maybe in days or weeks, maybe in hours. He felt a hand on his shoulder. Turning round to his surprise he saw Eleazar. He took Judas quickly aside to whisper that this same morning the Sanhedrin had decided to seize Jesus by surprise. Since he had many friends among the officers of the temple, Eleazar added that he had warned them to leave the preacher alone in order to avoid a hopeless struggle with the Galileans. One of them had answered he would leave the prophet alone, because no man ever spoke like this man. And Judas, who inwardly had always had a faint distaste for Eleazar's actions, felt certain that this time he had really saved the Master's life.

Suddenly Jesus disappeared. Uneasy, Judas tried to find out which direction he had gone and chanced upon a group of officers who were discussing what they would tell their superiors since they had not seized the Nazarene. Reassured, Judas went back to his parents.

On the sixth day of the feast Simon and Cyborea went home, happy with the promise that Judas would soon come to Kerioth. Simon offered his son a small pouch of gold pieces, which Judas would not accept. He didn't need them, he said. But Simon said this money might be useful to him. He might need it for his Master. Then Judas, who always held on to the paltry copper coins in his cowhide purse, put the gold pieces negligently into his belt. With a smile he asked if Simon made so much gold now with his lambs that he could be so extravagant? Simon, embarrassed, said he was selling the lambs to the temple again. Good sacrificial animals were necessary, and Cyborea and he did not need the gold for themselves. The shepherds did not need money to feel rich, and even Ismael had become an honest toll gatherer. Then, for the first time in his life, Judas passed no harsh judgment on his father.

The following day Judas went in a happy mood through Jerusalem. The ancient city was festive with decorations of green garlands and large lulabs around doors and windows. Judas had made up his mind to enjoy this last day of the feast. He wanted to find the girl and drink spiced wine with her to the music of the cymbals and lutes. He didn't want to miss anything this day. He would cast the citron and shake the lulab in triumph when the holy water for the temple was drawn. After that ceremony the real rejoicing would begin.

Just as Judas entered the temple, the priest, covered with his costly vestment, raised the golden ewer in both hands. On his breast he wore the golden plate with twelve precious stones in many colors, whereby the spiritual state of the twelve tribes was symbolized. Judas looked at the stone of his tribe, that of Reuben. First it seemed blood-red, but as a ray of sunlight fell on it the stone reflected a celestial light. The priest turned to all sides displaying the golden ewer. Then everyone followed the priest to a small pond, surrounded by walls, at the foot of Mount Zion. As they walked, they exchanged remarks with the people along the road. In vain Judas looked for the girl.

When the procession reached the pond, a trumpet sounded as a sign for the people to range themselves around it. A second time the trumpet sounded. Solemnly the priest descended the marble steps and three times he raised the golden ewer above his head. At the third trumpet blast he drew water three times to take to the temple. This time the crowd followed in silence. At the Gate of the Water all the priests of the temple stood waiting, the sacred trumpets ready. The instant the water was carried over the threshold joyous blasts sounded louder and louder until the priests reached the altar slope, while all the time the lulabs shook triumphantly. Then suddenly there was silence. The priest brought the holy water in a silver basin to the west side of the altar while wine was poured in another basin at the east side. Then, solemnly, the hallel was sung and at the last verse each of the gaily clad worshipers shook his lulab and all burst out in loud jubilation.

As he left the temple Judas saw the vivacious face of the girl. She laughed and said she was happy to see him back at last. He had given her the figs, she said, and then he had hidden himself ever since, because he didn't want to go with her to the feast. He smiled and said he had looked for her everywhere. But now he would go with her outside the city gate where the merrymakers gathered. Together they went off and chose a gaily decorated garden.

A servant took them to a snug spot suitable, he said, for a couple in love, and asked if he should bring the best wine for the bride and bridegroom. A young woman at a near-by table cried that the sour wine would surely come later when they were married. Judas and the girl laughed. They enjoyed the spiced wine and honey cakes. A group of jugglers and singers burst in to the garden, like a flock of gay birds. A clown pulled Judas' red hair and asked the girl if she had chosen him in order to have a torch with her both day and night. Judas tossed a copper coin at the clown's head which he caught as he bowed himself away to another table. An Egyptian, accompanied by the metallic jingling of a sistrum, sang the old ballad of the warrior in the desert who had almost died from thirst when a beautiful maiden came and gave him a cup of cool water. But as they looked each other in the eyes the maid and the warrior were suffused with blushes so that the water turned red like the wine and the warrior's hand trembled so that the water fell from his cup and he couldn't quench his thirst. From a vendor Judas bought a red rose that he put in the girl's hair. The woman at the other table again shouted something at them, but her words were lost when her companion, who had had too much wine, fell over, upsetting the table. Judas helped him to his feet, but the girl was frightened. It was not a good place to celebrate this feast, she said, and they decided to go back to the city.

The girl walked close beside Judas. The night wind had loosened strands of her hair which she kept pushing back from her temple as she talked. Judas avoided her eyes but looked at her shapely neck and the curves of her breasts. He felt her soft body against him. His heart pounded. She went on talking, and her voice was like music in his ears. But again the image of Mary rose before him, and he knew it was impossible for him ever to love another woman. For Mary alone he yearned, body and soul. He felt a vague feeling of pity for the girl, for she was lonely even though near him. His joyful mood had gone. This feast meant nothing to him any longer. He would take the girl home and then go his own way.

The night was moonlit and everything was peaceful, yet Judas felt sad. "How difficult it is to find real joy in life," he said.

Looking sidewise at him the girl saw the expression on his face, and she said, "Yes, true joy can only be found if we put our hearts in it."

They crossed a small park. The shadows of trees fell on the path, a fountain splashed with a monotonous sound, and near by they heard the thin voice of an old story-teller. They joined the couples who had gathered round the old man.

"The angel said, 'Follow me and I will show you the garden of happiness.' They came to a tree with golden apples. 'This is the tree of life. And isn't the garden around it beautiful?' the angel asked. As the man looked around he saw the tree with golden apples and around it trees with ripe figs and vines with grapes. But he saw another tree with exquisite fruit, and exclaimed that he wanted that fruit. But the angel said this was impossible as long as he stood under the tree of life, for the other was the fruit of paradise. The angel and the man went past trees with no fruit at all, trees yielding wood for houses, for tables and beds. They went through fields with fragrant flowers and meadows serene to the eye. In a voice with the sound of heavenly fountains, the angel said, 'All this is the garden of happiness around the tree of life with fruit and flowers like those in paradise.' " The old-story-teller was silent. The fountains splashed monotonously in the marble basins.

"Judas," the girl said as they went on, "I was very happy to be with you this night and I hope one day you, too, will enter the garden of happiness."

Listening to the story, Judas had been at peace again. The girl was desirable enough, but her beauty no longer disturbed him. His hand had touched the golden fruit of the tree of life, but he would not pluck it. With the girl's hand in his own, he took her home. An old woman opened the door.

"It is late, my lord," she said. "Therefore I don't ask you to come in." After a friendly nod she turned away.

Judas gave the girl a parting kiss. But as she slowly closed the door there was disappointment in her eyes.

On his way back to Galilee Judas took a footpath along the sea. It was a clear bright day. Birds were singing, doves cooing in the high trees whose crowns were colored with the gold of autumn. Now and then he stopped to look into the clear depths of the sea, inhaling the fragrance of the flowers. The rocks near the water made him suddenly think of the small pond at Kerioth and the painful scenes with Rahab when he had not responded to her. Now a longing rose in him. If a young woman were lying here in the white sand, he. . . .

Frightened at his own thoughts he threw his head backward as if to throw off this image and hastily he went on, his big sandals crunching through the white sand. His eye fell on a pink shell resembling the nail of a woman's toe. And suddenly he thought of the young woman in the evil street of Bethsaida. To divert his mind he looked at the rocks rising above the water overgrown with fine ferns waving at the slightest stir of the air, like the hair on the girl's temple. He had been stupid to take her home, he thought. Going on he discovered in the cracked layers of a rock the lines of a woman's body. He stopped looking about him. Something sinful pervaded all nature, conjuring up images he didn't want to see.

But as he walked on he thought again of the young girl at the feast, how close she had been as she walked with him. The sun burned on his head, a feverish feeling ran through his blood. Suddenly he felt anxious to be back in the Master's surroundings where no sinful hallucinations could plague him. And he left the footpath and took the high road.

In the first hamlet he crossed he saw a woman sitting on the threshold of her house. She was one of those women who offer shelter to passing travelers. Before her stood two Gallic soldiers of a Roman auxiliary cohort who were showing her some foreign coins and some trinkets. They were arguing about who would be the first to go in. The woman did not understand a word of it and she called out to Judas to tell her what they were saying. He could stay with her, she said, but first she would take the money from the barbarians.

In distaste Judas hastily turned and went on. Yet this woman had a fine face and form. Wasn't beauty one of the Almighty's attributes? In his anxiety to get away from his own thoughts he hurried to return to his group, where all thought was of God's kingdom. Thinking of the kingdom his thoughts wandered again to Mary, and he saw her seated on a throne of gold, a diadem of pearls and diamonds on her brow. He, the last among the disciples, would be the greatest in the kingdom of Mary, his queen. He forgot altogether that this was not the kingdom of God, but that of Judas Iscariot, an hallucination conjured up by the dangerous division in his own nature.

17

The Master with his twelve disciples and some of the seventy were on their way to Jerusalem. As usual Judas and Philip were walking together. Although it was a clear day, dark thunderclouds suddenly appeared.

"These clouds always bring a terrible event to my mind," said Philip. "One day, when I was on my way to Jerusalem as today, a youth went part of the way with me. Suddenly a heavy thunderstorm broke and we sought shelter under a sycomore. I was blinded by a flash of lightning and a terrible thunderclap made the earth tremble. Recovering from my fright I saw the youth lying lifeless at my feet. Someone came along who recognized him and carried the body home. I walked on, lonely and depressed, wondering whether this was an accident of nature, or a punishment of the Almighty because the youth was a sinner. In my confusion I sat down by the road to think. Words of Job crossed my mind that no upright man would be condemned by the Lord. And I did not find a solution."

"But Philip," Judas said, "Isn't it also written that the wickedness of man is great and his injustice endless? If this goes for all of us then the young man may still have been a great sinner."

"Perhaps," Philip said and again he glanced at the thundercloud, by now drifting away. Nevertheless there was a premonition of approaching disaster. Again and again Judas gazed over the road, and after some time he discovered in the far distance a cloud of dust coming rapidly nearer. It was an Arab camel rider, who halted at some distance and dismounted. From afar he called out, "Judas!" It was Eleazar's voice. "Are the women with you?"

"They are in Bethany," Judas shouted, astonished at Eleazar's unusual behavior.

This seemed to reassure Eleazar. More calmly he approached and said, "I came to warn you that none of the Galileans among you should go into Jerusalem. The Romans have been attacked by a band of Galileans, and even the temple has become a bloody battfield."

"The temple a battlefield?" Judas exclaimed, horrified.

At these words some of the other disciples approached. "Fighting in the temple?" Philip asked. "How could they enter there with weapons?"

"These Galilean fools crept into the subterranean water conduit of the Romans," Eleazar said, "near the tower of Siloam outside the city walls. From there they entered the temple by way of the connecting channel the priests had constructed for the supply of water to clean the altars. The attackers planned to seize the weapons in the armory destined to protect the temple treasure and then, along the altars, enter the temple itself. There they would be joined by apparently peaceful Galileans bringing offerings. Together they would enter the tower of Antonia, open on that side. They would overpower the Roman soldiers by surprise, kill them to the last man and occupy the tower. But the whole conspiracy to the last detail was betrayed to the Romans."

"It is a great calamity," Philip said, "that the Galileans again and again try to obtain freedom by drawing the sword."

"The kingdom cannot be founded by violence," Judas said sternly. "It is a grievous sin to start a fight within the temple."

"There was not much fighting," Eleazar said. "Forewarned, the Romans were on the alert. When they heard the frightened priests call out for help, they rushed in and slaughtered the Galileans near the altars. Not a single one escaped. The Romans killed them underground, in the city, in the tower of Siloam where they entered the Roman water conduit, and in the temple. The insurrection is now quelled, but I would advise all Galileans to avoid Jerusalem for the time being."

Judas was indignant. Had not the Master time and again preached of peace in Galilee? The Master, who had said to give to Caesar the things which were Caesar's, had apparently spoken in vain. The only result was that these simpletons had taken up arms. Not only had they endangered the lives of all peaceful Galileans by their foolhardiness, but they had desecrated the temple and sinned against the Master's teachings of peace. They had received the just reward for their deeds, Judas reflected.

"It was a senseless undertaking," Eleazar said, "doomed to failure. And many innocent Galileans became the victims." Then, taking Judas aside, he asked if he could ask his Master a question.

It was the first time, that the zealot had expressed this desire to Judas, although he often had listened to the Master's words. How often had he proposed to bring Eleazar to the Master? But Eleazar had always answered that the prophet's mission and his own calling could not tolerate each other. Now Eleazar approached the Master and halted. The Master invited him to speak.

"Rabboni," Eleazar said respectfully, "many in Galilee who have heard your word but didn't understand it have recklessly taken up arms. Now they have been killed in Jerusalem and even about the altars in our holy temple. Pilate has mingled their blood with the sacrifices."

Jesus bent his head as if a storm had passed over him.

"Rabboni," Eleazar said, "they have sinned indeed, but can their sins be forgiven?"

The Master looked seriously at the zealot's sharply cut face and asked if he thought those Galileans were sinners above all other Galileans because they suffered such things. Answering his own question, the Master said, "this is not so. Unless you repent, you all will likewise perish."

"Rabboni," Eleazar said, "Many innocent have also fallen victims. Some armed attackers forcefully entered the tower of Siloam and killed some Romans. Innocent Galileans, pursued by the Romans, took refuge in the tower. The Romans killed eighteen of them with stones."

Jesus asked Eleazar whether he thought that those eighteen were greater sinners than others in Jerusalem. Again Jesus said this was not so, and again he warned that unless they repented they would likewise perish.

Eleazar looked into the Master's eyes. He wanted to say that as a warrior he did not fear death. But he hesitated, for he felt that his words were like snow that melts in the sun. Jesus, fearing nothing, went on to Jerusalem at the head of his followers.

Eleazar went back to his mount and led the camel, reflecting. Again and again Eleazar heard the Prophet's words: "Unless you repent you all will likewise perish." But how could he repent until mercy and truth, peace and justice prevailed in Israel? Must the zealots not fight for the freedom of the people and the country without fearing death, without repenting their actions? Suddenly Eleazar felt a great wave of doubt. Was the liberation the zealots were fighting for a delusion? Was perhaps the other liberation of which the Prophet spoke the only true one? Were the zealots in the dark? Yet, even in the dark, ways must be found to reach to the goal. He brought his camel down and swung into the saddle.

18

It was a sultry moonless night. The secretary, Manlius, with a small box under his arm, was slipping quietly through the dark street near the harbor of Caesarea. In a side street a woman's screams and quarreling men's voices broke the nocturnal peace of the harbor, where the lights of the ships bobbed up and down to the rhythm of the waves. The secretary stopped at a tavern where two legionaries joined him, and together they went off in the direction of the Procurate.

Once or twice Manlius stopped and waited for the feeble ray coming from a lighthouse where at regular intervals slaves turned the brass mirrors to and fro, jerkily reflecting the light of a heap of white-hot charcoal. Every time the ray of light glided over the ship just arrived from Rome with the last courier from Sejanus on board, Manlius was reassured that no other ship had come in as yet. He had taken the courier straight to a house near the harbor where he regularly met travelers from Rome, entertaining them and drawing them out. It was there he had received the box from the courier.

Manlius was relieved when he saw the dark buildings of the Procurate loom up before him. He went straight to his workroom, hurriedly opened the box and carefully examined all the scrolls it contained, making sure that all the confidential letters from Pilate to Sejanus were there, duly numbered and classified according to date. Only the last one was missing. Manlius unlocked the little room where the secret archives were kept and took out the copy of this last letter. With mounting vexation he read; "Sejanus, my noble friend and protector, greetings from Pontius Pilate. In these days there is nothing I appreciate more than keeping in touch with a man like you. . . . Never have I applied to you for help in vain. You have so often given me advice not only in matters of state but also in personal matters. . . . With your support I found happiness by marrying Claudia Procula, although in the beginning our marriage was so full of political complications. Forgive me, Sejanus, for forgetting to thank you for your kind promise to watch over my personal interests like a friend and to ward off any attempt against us. . . ."

Manlius remembered that when he had written this letter he had discreetly offered his opinion that the exaggerated expressions of friendship for Sejanus be dropped. But Pilate had asked in his usual cold manner whether he or his secretary composed his letters. Utterly exasperated Manlius threw the letter on the table. Pontius was a bungler, stubborn as a mule, stupid enough to write this and prepare his neck for the sword of Tiberius' executioner.

Manlius heard steps outside and there was a loud knocking on the door of his workroom. It was the patrol under the centurion Longinus, a friend of his youth. Manlius asked him to come in.

"It is fortunate that you came, Longinus. There are bad tidings for you. Your uncle Gaius is dead."

"Gaius?" Longinus exclaimed.

"Stabbed to death by Tiberius' life guard."

"My uncle, a friend of the mighty Sejanus, murdered?" he asked incredulously. "He had neither money nor estates to confiscate. He didn't go in for politics, so why he? My father was killed because he was an adversary of Sejanus, and now Gaius killed because he was his friend?"

Manlius put his forefinger on his mouth and whispered, "Sejanus, too, is dead, assassinated by the order of Caesar himself. That's why you're in a good spot now, Longinus, as a son of one of Sejanus' adversaries. Choose the right direction now, and soon you will be even mightier than our commander Marcus Rufus himself."

Longinus shrugged his shoulders. Manlius, understanding that Longinus wanted no part of Roman might, asked him to call Marcus Rufus and rouse the Procurator. "One cannot always sleep, Longinus."

As Longinus' steps receded in the corridor Manlius sat down at his desk. He and Longinus, both sons of poor minor nobles, had been devoted friends from the time they were boys. There had been four of them together, he and Longinus and two other sons of very wealthy aristocrats, four proud young Romans. The two others had died a horrible death in the pit of the Capitol after Caesar Tiberius had put their fathers to death and confiscated their possessions. Now probably it was Longinus' turn and his own. Such were the conditions nowadays in the powerful city of Rome and the mighty empire, always represented as a bold roaring lion. At best it was a moth-eaten lionskin. A single kick and it would split apart. Everything looked so beautiful in Rome: the banquets with fine food, the wines and costly flowers, the parks with white peacocks and marble statues and ponds with roses and jasmine round them and the arena with magnificent games. Yet all the harpists, singers, and flutists could not play down the screaming of the tortured. These Romans always talked of their empire and their *pax Romana,* the Roman peace they imposed on the world. But instead of peace there would be the silence of death, when all good citizens were destroyed. Corrupt Romans betrayed their best friends for a piece of property. And even the wise Seneca trembled for fear he would fall in disgrace, knowing very well that all his theories on wisdom and morality had not reformed one single Roman.

Manlius' meditations were interrupted by the entrance of Marcus Rufus. "What are you doing here in the dark of night, Manlius?"

"Tomorrow may be darker still, Commander. His Imperial Majesty, our Master and Lord of the World, Caesar Tiberius, has been graciously pleased to have his favorite friend and our protector Sejanus tortured to death in a horrible way. He is giving the same treatment now to Sejanus' adherents everywhere. The next ship from Rome may very well bring our executioners."

Marcus Rufus' face turned pale. At that moment Pontius Pilate entered and asked irritably, "What do you mean by calling me at this hour of the night, Manlius. Have you gathered some important news in conversations with your girl friends in the market place?"

Ignoring Pilate's surly words, Manlius said coolly, "Our friend and protector, Sejanus, is dead. His children, too, have been sentenced and put to death."

Pilate was speechless. Then he exclaimed, "Those must be lies. Roman law forbids the sentencing to death of virgins and minors."

"A Roman never violates the law, Procurator. That is why his young daughter was first raped and the boy was given the toga of an adult and a letter of emancipation before he was tortured to death, like one of our master's ephebi fallen in disgrace."

"Sejanus dead!" Pilate spoke the words as if he wanted to convince himself. "Did he die courageously, like a Roman?"

"That is difficult to say, Procurator. The Teutonic executioners slowly pulled his limbs apart. His screams may very well have meant 'Hail Caesar,' " Manlius said bitterly.

"Manlius, from whom did you get these lies?" Pilate asked angrily.

"From Sejanus' most trusted courier. He fled from Rome and arrived tonight in Caesarea. He brought back all the compromising letters written by the Procurator."

"Compromising letters? Sejanus was my friend."

"From now on the Procurator must forget this friendship. In Rome more than two hundred nobles and senators, all friends of Sejanus, are doomed to death. More than a hundred are already dead. Rome enjoys preference. Then it will be our turn. I'm sorry to say so but your last letter is missing, Procurator. It is the only document that can be used against us. Here is the copy."

"And the Praetorian Guard did not even defend their commander?" Pilate asked dejectedly.

"Sejanus himself was misled and his Praetorians were bribed."

Pontius Pilate stared in front of him. Then he turned to Rufus. "What must we do now?" he asked in a faltering voice.

"First burn all the correspondence with Sejanus," Rufus said. "Keep an eye on all incoming ships for persons dangerous to us."

Manlius began to tear up the scrolls and burn them in the brazier. For years he had gone to the market place, he said, not to see women, as the Procurator had suggested, but to get information about what was going on in Rome and Capri. If the correspondence with Sejanus had been found in Rome they all would be lost now.

At that moment excited voices sounded in the hallway.

Manlius hurried out and came back with a dispatch rider with a letter for the Procurator. Pilate took it and unrolling it he saw the handwriting of his friend Vitellius, Prefect of Antioch. Pilate read confirmation of the news of Sejanus' death. "Now we must use the utmost caution," Vitellius went on. "You are in less danger than I, because you don't pass for being rich. If I am called back to Rome you will know that I am lost. Whatever my fate is I will try to protect Claudia and you. I have already received a warning that I was placed on the list of the condemned. Therefore I immediately sent a courier to Caesar Tiberius presenting him with my estate at Capri. If this is insufficient I will offer him more. I don't expect an answer from you and above all don't write to Rome."

Pilate rolled up the scroll. "Vitellius is a wise man. He has adapted himself to everything," he said.

Rufus, who was watching the last scraps of papyrus burning in the brazier said, "Vitellius is a good Roman and more slippery than an eel. Yet this is of no avail when the whole empire is tumbling about our heads."

Pilate went back to his private rooms and remained secluded. He sat at his desk brooding. Never before had he asked himself how Sejanus, whose protection he had enjoyed, had used or misused his power. Never before had he been so strongly convinced of the insecurity in which every prominent Roman citizen lived. At this moment his thoughts went back to his friend Germanicus who after his victories on the Teutonic battlefields was undermined by Tiberius and later killed off like a cow in a slaughterhouse. His wife, Agrippina, had been maltreated by Tiberius, whose perverted mind turned against all beautiful or significant women. Pilate trembled as he thought of what might happen to Claudia if he, as Sejanus' friend, were destroyed. He was now compelled to deny Sejanus, and pretend he had never been his friend. Meantime Claudia should be kept out of it. Tomorrow he would make certain decisions.

Pilate slept little that night. He heard the monotonous rustling of the cedars in the courtyard. A cold night wind drove the clouds across the starry sky. But when at last the sun rose flaming, it seemed to him a hopeful sign for a brighter future despite everything. He had the feeling of having risen inwardly above all these frightful happenings. In spite of the chaos of a rotting empire he could still accomplish many useful things.

Early in the morning he summoned Marcus Rufus and Manlius to discuss the special measures that should be taken after the happenings in Rome. The three agreed that there were three reasons for asking reinforcements from Vitellius: First, to protect themselves against a possible attack from Macro, the slave who had taken Sejanus' place; second, the restlessness in Jerusalem caused by the teachings of the prophet of Nazareth; third, the threat of an uprising in Samaria where a Roman was said to be involved.

Manlius remarked that the Procurator should not forget Claudia's relationship to Caesar Augustus, which might be a reason to accuse her husband of being a pretender to the crown. Pilate brushed this aside as ridiculous. Yet he was not reassured as to Claudia's safety, and decided to request reinforcements from Vitellius.

However, in spite of the fact that he was not hurriedly called back to Rome, Vitellius did not hasten to dispatch the troops.

19

The Master and the disciples walked quietly in the direction of Bethany, where they would go to the house of Simon the leper. Coming from Jerusalem some of them were still depressed by the inexplicable hostility of the crowd there. Judas, on the contrary, was happy they had escaped from the city. He was the only one who fully understood how precarious their situation was. Eleazar had gravely warned him that the Sanhedrin systematically stirred up the crowd against his Master, whom they had branded the "false Messiah." And in his anxiety Judas said to Peter that the Master should avoid irritating his adversaries. Peter replied, "When a devil sees an angel he can't help flying into a passion. The just look to the Master's good works, but his foes despise his words of truth."

"There was still another calamity," Philip said. "Lazarus has been seriously ill."

"Lazarus is no more," John said.

Thaddeus affirmed that Lazarus was dead. The Master surely could have healed him, but now it was too late. Lazarus' sisters lived outside Bethany, and Judas thought it might be better to avoid the hamlet itself, because there might be some hostility in the crowd. Suddenly on the road ahead he saw a large crowd and feared they were up to something. But coming nearer he saw they were simply peasants. One had a cithara and when the Master approached they sang for him who with his words had brought peace to the hearts of man.

As they walked on, James, the son of Alfeus, said they would be happy in Bethany, for in a marvelous dream he had seen them arriving there. Floors were empty, the vats were dry of wine and oil, and the fields and orchards had been eaten bare by the locusts and cankerworms. Then he had heard a voice saying: "Bethany is waiting for the miracle." Suddenly he stood in the midst of golden wheat fields. The floors were full of wheat, the wine presses were overflowing, and the vats were full of oil. There was music and singing. And the people came smiling out of their houses and praised the name of the Lord who had given everything in abundance.

The last miles were soon covered and they were greeted in a friendly way by the people. Then they saw Martha, Lazarus' sister, coming to meet the Master. She was weeping. If he had been there, she said, her brother would not have died. Jesus answered, "I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live."

"Matthew," Judas asked, "What does the Master mean by these words?"

But Matthew did not answer, for Mary came running up too, threw herself at the Master's feet and said the same words as her sister. Judas saw tears coming to the Master's eyes.

He went to the grave and cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth."

After resting in Bethany the Master went with all his disciples to Ephraim, a forsaken hamlet in the wilderness. And here, at last, Judas found peace. The Master was like a quiet lake in golden sunshine and his words refreshed Judas' thirsty soul, as they inspired all his disciples. Before them lay the golden harvest to gather in. A new hope rose in Judas' heart. The Master's enemies could not hurt him, for they did not know where he was.

Finally the day approached when they had to leave this paradise of peace in the wilderness. The Master ahead, they went down the hill of Ephraim. On the winding road through the valley pilgrims in great numbers went to Jerusalem. The disciples were thinking only of the fruitful work they were going to do. Only Judas sometimes looked anxiously at the Master who, without any fear, came out of his safe shelter to go to Jerusalem amidst the wolves. And Judas thought he saw an unusual glory about him. Alone Jesus walked through the dreary valley. No one dared to disturb him in his meditations.

At a lonely spot among forbidding rocks he halted and spoke to them. In simple words he said he would be betrayed to the priests, flagellated and mocked, and finally crucified.

Judas listened, his gaze fixed upon the ground. Betrayed? Who would betray him? The Master crucified! And the horrible memory of robbers he had seen crucified came to his mind. But the other followers did not seem deeply impressed by the Master's words. Perhaps the mere idea was too terrible to take in, or did these sturdy Galileans really lack all understanding of the dangers that threatened the Master?

As they started on their way again Judas remained close to the Master. An elderly woman with a sallow complexion approached. Judas knew her. She was the mother of John and James, and Judas had heard that she considered them entirely ignorant of worldly matters since they had given up their profitable work. As she spoke to the Master she seemed very humble. A stream of warm praise ended in an urgent request. She asked for the assurance that in the new kingdom her two sons would sit on either side of the Master.

Jesus looked earnestly at the woman and then at her two sons who stood behind her. Then he asked quietly whether they knew what they were asking. Were they able to drink of the cup from which he would drink and be baptized as he would be baptized? And they said they were able. But Judas saw the terrifying image of the Master on the cross. In his desperation he wanted to cry out that the others were not humble servants; they were seeking only power and glory, for they wanted to be the greatest.

Then the Master said solemnly that to sit on his right hand and on his left hand was not his to give; it would be given to those for whom it was prepared by his Father.

Judas saw the disappointment in the woman's eyes. With lagging step, her shoulders down, she went away, as Judas thought again of the Master's horrible prediction.

After crossing a somber treeless canyon they reached Jericho, the city of palms, flowers, and clear water, called the paradise of God. Judas and Romelo saw to it that the Master had a shelter in a house worthy of him. Nevertheless the Master put up at the house of Zaccheus, a despised toll gatherer. Zaccheus offered the Master half of all he possessed, but He refused. Judas sincerely rejoiced at the blessing that had come to the house of this sinner.

Leaving Jericho they passed through a rocky mountain range. On Friday, the eighth day of Nizam, they reached Bethany before the sabbath had begun. They would rest in the house of Simon the leper. At the bend of the road Judas saw the house on the top of a hill covered with the gold of the sunset, as in a peaceful dream. Images of Mary rose before him: Mary busy with her humble work, or wrapped in the soft folds of her cloak, sitting in the falling dusk after her work was done, waiting for him. He heard her melodious voice, and he was happy because he was going home, where Mary was.

The following day a bright sun was shining. The garden about the house was full of lilies, roses, and big purple violets. Between the lawns were rows of old cedars and sycomores whose foliage gently rustled in the wind. Far away a little stream meandered through the valley. The house, at other times so quiet, was now in a state of commotion. Many guests had come in, and outside a crowd of excited onlookers milled about. Like wildfire the news had spread that the Nazarene had come, he who had raised Lazarus. Among the curious were many strangers. One of them, clad in a simple cloak, screened his face against the sun with his kaffiyeh. Cautiously he questioned several men from Bethany. Had the miracle-worker really called back Lazarus from the dead or was it merely an exaggerated story? Yes, Lazarus was dead and had lain for many days in the grave, and now he was eating and drinking and laughing again. Had not Lazarus cheated them all, the stranger said, to bring fame to the miracle rabbi? No, they said, why would Lazarus lie for days in the grave for the sake of the prophet of Nazareth? Hadn't they all seen his sisters Martha and Mary weeping? They pointed out Judas as one of the Nazarene's followers.

The man then turned to Judas and asked in the language of a learned rabbi if he had seen the miracle happen. Reluctantly Judas said, "My Master did not perform this miracle merely to amaze the people." He pointed to a cave close to an olive tree. "There is the cave where Lazarus was buried. I myself helped to roll back the tombstone. My Master thanked his Father that he had heard him, and cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out.' And Lazarus who was dead came out."

"Your Master has really done that?" the man exclaimed. "Yet he wanders in the dust of the roads? My friend, to every king belongs a throne. Such a one belongs in a proper setting. One cannot reform the world when one has no fixed abode and is begging along the roads."

Judas nodded, somewhat uncertain. This man did not speak like the Pharisees. The stranger added that the prophet's followers must admit that it was a mistake of their Master always to attack the mighty in Jerusalem. The day would come when he would need the high priests and the rulers. Carefully looking around he said, "If you want I can see to it that you are received as a friend by the high priest himself."

At that moment Mary of Magdala came through the garden, carefully carrying an object covered by a rich cloth. The stranger turned away. Her gaze fell on Judas and she beckoned him to her. "I must warn you to be careful these days, Judas," she said. "Since the news of Lazarus' resurrection has gotten around in Jerusalem we are surrounded by spies."

But Judas reassured her. "The man with whom I spoke is no Pharisee," he said. In his desire to be with her he accompanied her through the garden in the direction of the house. "Is the object you are carrying with so much care a present for Lazarus?" he asked.

"It is an alabaster box of spikenard. I saved it for the Master."

Her words cut Judas to the heart. That single devotion to the Master he could no longer stand. "You surely love the Master with a great love, Mary," he said.

"I only want to serve the Master in humility as long as he is still with us," she said. "The words he has spoken of his approaching death are always ringing in my ears."

Seeing her grief Judas said, "You would never leave us, Mary, even if the Master should die, would you?" Then the words escaped him. "You must know that I would do everything for you, make every sacrifice for you."

She heard the urgent passionate tone in his voice. Calmly she said, "Make this sacrifice for the Master, Judas Iscariot. We all must have no other desire than to serve him and his kingdom with our whole heart." Then she turned and left him.

Judas looked after her as she went through the colonnade and disappeared in the house. He was crushed. She would never be his. As if from a distance he heard a voice asking him who this beautiful woman was. It was the stranger again. Judas did not answer and went quickly to the other side of the garden. Here he was alone and he could look into the house. He did not want to go inside, for he saw Mary standing near the couch where the Master was resting. She was listening intently to him, Judas saw. Strange, disturbing thoughts stirred his mind. She was standing there as if before Elohim's throne. Now she surely was thinking how Jesus had once delivered her from her seven devils and how he had elevated her from the dark into the light. Judas looked at the Master, pure of body and soul, a saint. Bent before him, Mary felt the burden of her past life, of all her sins that once had brought her, one of the thoughtless ones, into the abyss. Judas saw that she wept, filled with repentance, and her tears fell on the Master's feet. She was ashamed before the eyes of the crowd and tried to hide her tears by bending her head. He felt a great compassion and wanted to console her. But she must go now, go away. A fierce feeling of jealousy rose in Judas. She should be his, his alone. In his agony he closed his eyes. When he looked up again he saw Mary's blond hair falling about her like a golden mantle. Once only had he beheld her hair like this. But then, from her litter, her eyes had rested on him alone of all the multitude. Never yet had his hand touched her hair and felt the softness of it.

Now Judas saw to his horror that she knelt down and wiped the Master's feet with her hair. His face twisted in pain, his throat tightened. Yet he looked on, his brow wet with perspiration. He could not stand it any longer, and yet, as one paralyzed, he stayed. She opened the alabaster box and poured the nard over the Master's feet and anointed them.

Judas saw that some men were touched with pity at the sight of a woman kneeling, but others muttered to each other. If this were a real prophet, they said, then he would know who this woman was and repudiate her as any upright believer would do. After merely touching a sinful woman, strict isolation and the observance of many regulations was necessary to be cleansed from impurity. And yet this Nazarene had not repudiated her.

Judas felt a burning pain. This must end, this adoration, this anointing of the Master's feet. What right did she have to give this costly nard to the Master alone? All of a sudden he heard his own voice asking to what purpose was this waste. For the money this ointment would have brought could have been given to the poor. The Master seemed to have heard his words, for he asked why Judas troubled the woman who had done a beautiful thing to him. For they always had the poor with them, but they could not always have him. She had anointed his body for burial.

Deeply humiliated, Judas bent his head. Again the Master spoke, saying that wherever the gospel would be preached, this would be spoken of in memory of her.

Mary anointed the Master's head as if he were the king in his kingdom. Now for all eternity the Master had elevated her, Judas thought. The king had assigned her the place next to him, the queen's place. And Judas, who should have applauded his adored Mary, had been unfaithful to her in his secret soul. The sweet odor of the nard came floating to him. The Master's words about the preparation for his burial resounded in Judas relentlessly. The odor of the nard seemed to him now the odor of death. Yet it was the same nard that the bride put in the hollow between her breasts to be like a fragrant flower to her bridegroom.

Slowly he came back to reality, and turning round he stood before the stranger.

"You were the only one here, my friend, who took the lot of the poor to heart, and justly criticized this waste," the man said.

Dazed, Judas looked at the man. Then he went away without saying a word.

The man turned to a rabbi who accompanied him. Looking through a side window into the room he said, "See how they sit like kings at the abundant table. Miracles they perform, but sins, wine-drinking, and waste rule unchallenged."

The rabbi looked on intently. "Your Holiness," he whispered, "the best thing to do would be to kill Lazarus. Then the miracle would never have taken place, would it?"

"The miracles are not the greatest danger," Caiaphas said bitterly. "The danger is in his words. He preaches freedom and love. He makes the feeble too strong, the small ones too great. To the poor he gives bread that should be earned by hard work. When masters don't keep their servants down, obedience and respect due to us, the priests, are no more. He teaches the people to think. They shouldn't think. We are the ones to think, they must only obey."

The onlookers all went to the other side of the house, for Jesus of Nazareth had left the room. The high priest and the rabbi followed the crowd. They saw Jesus take a small path up the hill. Shouts of joy went up in the crowd.

"They're blind and bewitched," the rabbi said bitterly.

Louder and louder sounded the jubilation and the people shouted. "Hosanna, blessed be the son of David, blessed be our King."

Dusk was falling over Jerusalem as Eleazar mounted a handsome black horse and hurriedly left the city. He was on his way to Bethany, where, he had been told, the Nazarene and his disciples were staying. That same day he had discovered that the former high priest Annas was scheming to destroy the prophet. Judas must be warned.

It was by accident that Eleazar knew about it. He had come to Jerusalem for a few days after a long stay in Samaria and among the Arab tribes, where he had concluded strategic plans for a revolt against the Romans. That morning he met a friend who was going to a meeting Annas had called in the hall in the Chanujoth under the twin cedar of Olivett, where the former high priest's shops were. When his friend said that all adversaries of the Nazarene were bidden to come, Eleazar became suspicious. On his many expeditions through the wilderness his thoughts often wandered back to the encounter with the prophet whose words admonishing him to repent he could not forget. The image of the Nazarene's wondrous eyes rose before him. And now Annas called together his enemies, surely with a sinister aim. He decided to go to the meeting. During the discussion it became clear to him that the Nazarene's very life was threatened by the mighty in the temple and by powerful men in Jerusalem. It would be a terrible blow for Judas to hear all this, Eleazar thought, but he should know the facts.

At the house of Simon the leper in Bethany, Eleazar found Judas seated by himself at a long table under the dismal light of a single lamp. His friend had changed, it seemed to Eleazar; he looked tired and downcast.

Judas' face brightened, however, when he looked up.

"Eleazar, you're here!" he exclaimed: "I thought you were far away, somewhere in the desert." Seeing the worried expression on Eleazar's face, he asked, "What's the matter? You look as if something terrible has happened."

"Nothing has happened as yet," Eleazar said. "But I want to speak to you alone."

Casting a glance at the adjoining room where the disciples slept, Judas said, "Come with me." He took Eleazar to a distant spot in the garden where in the moonlight the dark forms of a row of cedars stood out against the sky.

"I have come to warn you, Judas," Eleazar said. "Your Master's life is in danger."

Judas was startled. "Who is threatening him?"

"In Jerusalem all the people know that the words of indignation your Master has spoken against the mighty have stirred up their hatred. Today I have been at a meeting called by Annas, where he had brought together as many of your Master's opponents as he could find. There were Pharisees and Sadducees; Herodians and priests, scribes and lawyers and many Gentiles who are offended by your Master's words. All these different people were unanimous in their accusations of your Master."

"But of what can they accuse him?" Judas said desperately. "He preaches the truth of God."

"They deny that. They are blind with hatred," Eleazar said. "Annas started by saying that the so-called descendant of King David was trying to conquer his kingdom by witchcraft and trampling down all divine laws and regulations. A rich merchant shouted that if it were to go on, this carpenter who wanted to be king would drive them all out of their comfortable dwellings. One of the Pharisees said your Master dared to blaspheme the Lord and desecrated the temple by bringing discord to it. A rabbi spoke of Lazarus whom the

Nazarene had called back from the dead. With his own eyes he had seen, he said, how this sorcerer was anointed, like a king, with the finest nard, and how he and his disciples drank the festive wine. They were rejoicing, he said, that the hour was at hand when the Nazarene, as King, would drive the priests out of the temple, and take away their possessions. Then Annas stood up and asked a judgment. And they all shouted to kill the Nazarene, to have him crucified."

At these terrible words Judas covered his eyes. He shook his head in desperation.

"It is terrible to hear, Judas," Eleazar said. "My opinion is that unless your Master stays away from Jerusalem and ceases to preach, he is lost."

"But Eleazar," Judas exclaimed, "how can you suggest such a thing? My Master will never cease to teach the truth."

Eleazar was silent. After a moment's reflection he said, "Listen, Judas, there may be a way out. You are not aware perhaps why Annas bears your Master such a deadly hatred. It is not only because your Master defeats the priests with his wisdom and disrupts their traditions. He also hurts Annas and his family in their greed. You know they are richer than King Herod. In their four shops of Olivett they have for years been accumulating riches by selling meager sacrificial doves. This is merely an extra profit. Their real profit comes from the trade in the temple porticoes and the Court of the Gentiles."

"I cannot believe it, Eleazar," Judas said. "The priests themselves would desecrate the temple for the sake of money?"

"It is as I say," Eleazar said. "The traders in the temple are all sanctioned by the priests themselves, and all the shops and the booths of the money-changers are managed for their profit alone. Since your Master chased the traders out, the priests are in constant fear of losing their revenue."

"Yet my Master is right," Judas said, "when he cleanses God's house and when he rebukes those who transgress the commandments of God."

"He is right," Eleazar said, "but he cannot force the wicked to change their ways. His enemies have now formed powerful groups and are resolved to destroy him. Since they cannot kill your Master's truth, they will kill him. For he will surely not defend himself."

Suddenly the Master's words about the preparation for his burial came to Judas' mind. He was seized with fear. "My Master often speaks of his approaching death," he said. "Nobody can force him to defend himself."

"Then somebody else must defend him," Eleazar said. "You, the only Judean among the disciples, are the one to do it. Why don't you go to the high priest himself and try to come to a peaceful solution with him? Don't go to Annas. He is a tyrannical man, full of malice and meanness. Caiaphas would be easier to talk to. You could point out to him the great influence your Master has over the multitude. And don't forget to reassure him about losing his extra income. By a skilful mediation you may yet succeed in getting your Master out of danger."

Judas kept silent. Eleazar was right, he reflected. Something must be done. Maybe it was not impossible to come to an understanding with Caiaphas. The learned stranger in the garden had given him the same advice.

Seeing Judas' hesitation Eleazar encouraged him, "Not all the hierarchs and nobles hate Jesus of Nazareth. Some of them may even be on your side. I, as a zealot, can be of no help to you in talks with Caiaphas. Moreover, I am going back to my friends in Samaria to organize the revolt there.

It is a dangerous undertaking, and I don't know if I will come back from it."

"Then I am losing my best friend," Judas said dejectedly.

"You must follow your path, Judas, and I mine. You are out for peace and I for war. Yet, lately, I have often thought of the words of warning your Master spoke to me. Maybe he is right after all. Perhaps I should start a new life. Otherwise I may indeed perish like the Galileans in the temple."

Eleazar and Judas parted gloomily, for they were not certain they would ever see each other again. As Eleazar mounted his horse and disappeared in the night, a feeling of utter loneliness swept over Judas. That which he had always feared had happened: their mighty enemies had united to destroy the Master. And what could he do, as a simple disciple? Must he go to Caiaphas as Eleazar suggested and try to appease him with promises? But how could it be done? The Master could not possibly tolerate the temple's being made a house of merchandise in order to satisfy the lust for gain of the former high priest, Annas. Neither could he, to appease his enemies, give up preaching.

Judas heaved a deep sigh as he walked slowly back through the garden. The air was heavy with the sweet odor of lilies that grew by the path, their white chalices open to the moonlight. Their garment was more glorious than that of King Solomon, the Master had said. More glorious, Judas thought sadly, but how fragile. John once said that the Master's wisdom was greater than that of King Solomon. But what was the good of wisdom if it led only to destruction and death? No, wisdom alone was no longer sufficient. Wily he must be now, he who had never known cunning. He would surely find a way out.

In the light of the open door stood one of the women of the following. She was Joanna, Judas saw, the wife of Chuza, a steward of the Tetrarch. "I have been looking for you, Judas," she said. "I have word from my husband that the Tetrarch has repeatedly asked where he could reach the prophet of Nazareth."

"Did your husband say for what reason?" Judas asked.

"It seems that Herod believes our Master to be John the baptizer risen from the dead. He also has been told that Elias has appeared. Therefore he desires to see our Master. But my husband warned me that the Master should stay away. He is afraid our Master might suffer the same fate as John if Herodias should hear from him words that displease her."

As Joanna went away, Judas remained irresolutely standing near the door. Where could they go? Not to Jerusalem, he reflected, or to the cities of Galilee, or to Nazareth, where the people had rejected the Master's teachings with contempt. Where . . . where? It was hopeless. The memory of their first wanderings in Galilee came into his mind. That had been a happy time in spite of Judas' occasional relapses into doubt. Never had they been without high hopes for the kingdom. It seemed impossible that this was lost forever. He only needed to go to the priests, as Eleazar said, and reassure them concerning their financial interests in the temple. Then they would surely let the Master go unharmed. Avoiding the temple and the big cities the Master could still preach in Galilee, and again they would wander happily through the quiet villages and green mountains. The Master would heal the sick and console the poor. Sustained by his Father in heaven he would bless the people. Nobody would be hurt by sharp words, and enmity would disappear. The Master's glorious power must not be broken. Maybe the time would come that even in Jerusalem he would be honored. But first the Master must be convinced that he should make peace with the mighty, if not for his own sake then for the sake of his followers and the people who believed in him.

It would be useless, Judas reflected, to talk with the other disciples. None of them had ever shown any real anxiety when the Master spoke of his approaching death. He was all alone, Judas felt, thrown on his own resources. But he, the last and the most lowly of them, would save the Master—even against his will if it must be.

20

The news went the rounds in Jerusalem that the prophet of Nazareth would make a solemn entry into the city. In their joy some even said that the Messiah was coming. From Bethany Jesus went to Jerusalem surrounded by his twelve disciples, his followers, and a happy multitude. Above them the high palm trees along the road rustled gently, their branches light green against the spring sky. There was peace all about, the stillness of expectation. On the slopes of the hills the fields, dotted with flowers, lay fragrant in the morning sun. Everywhere birds were singing, and now and then a lark flew up with a triumphant song.

As they came near a village the Master called Peter and Judas to him. He said they should go into the village where they would find tied the foal of an ass that had never been ridden. They were to untie the animal and bring it to him and if anybody should ask why they did this, they were to say that the Lord needed it.

From a distance Judas saw the white animal. When the owner asked why they were untying his colt Judas said that the Lord needed it. The man nodded to them and said, "Peace be with you and your Lord." And as they led the colt to their Master, Judas felt a quiet happiness pervading him. Yet, in spite of himself, the proud entry he had imagined appeared before his mind's eye. The Master would ride a splendid white horse and he himself would be next to him on a spirited coal-black stallion, its saddle and bridle glittering with precious stones. But the Master had desired it otherwise, and Judas knew that he had chosen the right mount. Carefully he spread his white cloak on the colt's back and helped the Master to mount. Peter and John took the bridle. James walked on the Master's right side and Philip kindly gave his place on the Master's left to Judas Iscariot. So the Master went to Jerusalem, without display of greatness or splendor, in a joyous procession of simple men. Judas felt no fear that the Gentiles would scoff at the frail animal that was carrying the Master—they were too surprised. Everywhere the crowds, filled with joy, came to meet them. Many spread their festive garments in the dusty road in homage to the Master. Others laid flowers and palm leaves for the foal to tread on, and they sang and shouted for joy, "Hosanna to the son of David. Blessed be the king of Israel, he who comes in the name of God."

Hearing these words Judas on a sudden remembered Zechariah's prophecy about the king who would ride upon a colt, the foal of an ass. Looking up at the Master, Judas thought he was that king entering his kingdom in triumph.

Upward they went over the Mount of Olives to the east where, behind a salient, Jerusalem lay hidden. Turning a bend in the road, they suddenly saw in the valley before them the Holy City lying under the deep blue sky in its full splendor of pinnacles and gilded roofs suffused with golden light. This time Judas felt no depression at the sight of the mighty towers and palaces. His anxiety about the Master had subsided for the moment. Perhaps it was all going to work out, after all. Enraptured, he gazed upon the chosen city. Radiant with happiness, he glanced at Jesus only to have his smile wiped away. Instead of joy he saw only sorrow and pity on the face of the Master. Looking down upon the city, he wept and said that the days would come when her enemies would cast a trench about her and would not leave one stone upon the other.

As he heard these words, Judas bent his head in sorrow. When he looked up again the whole procession had come to a standstill. They were all looking silently over the Holy City.

There was a time for sorrow and a time for joy, Judas thought. Today the fountains of happiness should not be troubled, or the clear sky be clouded. This was the hour of the joyous entry into the Holy City. Protecting his eyes from the sun he saw a vast multitude in the valley of the Kidron and along the roads to the city and even on the battlements, all waiting for the Master's arrival. The pilgrims who had pitched their tents in the meadows knew that the promise of the Master's glorious entry was now going to be fulfilled, for already they had heard the jubilation from afar. The people were deeply moved. They plucked fresh palms to wave in honor of the Prophet. Like two streams merging, those who followed him united with those who came rejoicing to meet him. Louder and louder sounded the shouts of joy, the palms waving along the road as far as the gates of Jerusalem.

The disciples shouted for joy, too, for the hour of fulfilment had come. Only Judas, shocked by the tragic vision the Master had called up in beholding the city, strode silently beside the colt. Then, seeing a smile on the Master's face he, too, burst out in shouts of joy. As they all acclaimed the king who had come in the name of God, Judas cried loudly, "Blessed be the son of David, the king of the Jews."

An angry Pharisee came toward Judas trying to push him aside, but Judas warded him off. Furiously the man cried, "Master, rebuke your disciples!"

In the sudden silence that followed the Master said that if they should hold their peace, the very stones would cry out.

At these words, a new burst of acclaim broke from the crowds, and the procession went on to the gates of Jerusalem. There, from windows and porticoes, from roofs and all corners of the bazaar, the acclamations sounded for the king mounted on the white ass, for the Messiah. They reached Mount Moriah, which they could not cross with dusty feet, and the procession slowly dispersed. The Master dismounted and proceeded on foot to the temple. It was Judas who led the colt away, fed and watered it. Then, hesitantly, he took his white cloak from its back and went toward the temple.

The sun was hot as he reached the Susa Gate. Just three short years before, he remembered, the Master had cleansed the temple, and it had all been in vain. In the Court of the Gentiles he saw once more the herds of oxen, sheep, and lambs, and under the colonnade stood again the cages of doves. The money-changers and hagglers were present in vast numbers and in their greediness forgot all respect for the temple. Those who carried burdens were crossing the temple courts as if they were public roads. It was filthier than ever.

Judas saw the Master come forward from the group and wait patiently until there was comparative silence. Near him stood his disciples and many of the group of seventy, and behind those a great multitude. Opposite him, in a wide circle, stood the merchants, alarmed by the prophet's appearance in the temple.

It was written, the Master said to them, that God's house was a house of prayer, but they had made it a den of thieves. And with a stern gesture he ordered them to leave. They obeyed, for none of them dared to show opposition to the written word. The tables of the money-changers were upset and also those of the dove vendors. Judas saw Romelo quietly walk up to the vendors of oxen and good-naturedly help them take the animals out. He also carried the cages of doves out of the court as if he were their servant. Judas felt uneasy as he saw the undisguised hatred on their faces. They were in the service of the former high priest's family, as Eleazar had said. Was it a good idea for the Master to chase them out at this time? All his fears of the last days again rose in him. The traders had obeyed, but he felt certain they were out for revenge.

Half-heartedly Judas watched as the Master healed the sick, the crippled, and the blind who had come to the Court of the Gentiles. When he spoke to the gathered people, the children shouted Hosanna and honored him. The scribes and the rulers stood powerless.

Much later Judas saw Philip and Andrew pushing their way through the crowd. Their faces were solemn. Philip went to the Master and gave him a message from some Greeks clad in costly garments, standing at some distance. But even before Philip had finished speaking Judas heard the Master saying in a loud voice that the hour had come in which the Son of man should be glorified, and that if a grain of wheat died it brought forth fruit. He asked his father to save him from this hour.

Although the sky was clear, Judas heard a thunderclap. But others said that an angel had spoken. Again he heard the Master's voice saying that for a little while the light would be with them and they should walk while they had the light. Judas was crushed by this somber prophecy.

After Philip had exchanged more quiet words with the Master, Judas saw him and Andrew go back to the group of highborn Greeks. Philip spoke respectfully to them and the Greeks withdrew reluctantly. In his anxiety Judas asked Philip if he had brought the Master bad tidings. Philip said, no. These Greeks were ambassadors of the King of Edessa who had asked the Master to come to the king's court to heal him. But the Master had answered that when he had gone to his Father he would send one of his disciples to heal the king.

"Philip, why does the Master refuse?" Judas cried in despair. "Now, after his triumphal entry, a king sends his ambassadors to ask him to come to his capital. Our Master would be in safety there at this time when all kinds of dangers are threatening him."

"Judas, the Master does as the Father tells him."

Judas was silent, but a terrifying thought came to him. The kings of the East had come to his cradle, and now a king from the West had sent his ambassadors to his grave. The hour was near, Judas was convinced now; it was inescapable. In the bright sunshine the ambassadors seemed like radiant angels. And from the depth of his soul rose a prayer, "Master, even the kings of the earth need you. Be their equal before you go to your Father." He stood lost in thought. The joyous entry into the city, the healing of the sick, and now the king's ambassadors, seemed radiant and felicitous. And yet the Master had spoken of sorrow and afflictions.

John came to Judas and said that they should leave the temple at once and stay off the highroad. Dangers were threatening. It was true, Judas thought. He knew that only too well. But he was determined now to follow his own road, wherever it would take him. Reluctantly he went with the other disciples. Already he didn't belong inwardly with them. He must be strong now and wiser than even the Master himself, he thought. And why should he be doubtful? Hadn't the Master once said that if he who had faith in God should say to the mountain, "Be cast into the sea," it would be done. He remembered the Master's words that whatever anyone would ask in prayer, believing, he would receive. It was clear to him. Didn't he pray every day for the coming of the kingdom here on earth? Not for his own advantage, not to enslave other men, but only to compel the wicked to follow the right path.

Judas knew now it was his duty to go to the mighty of the temple in order that his Master's kingdom on earth should be established and he be crowned a king. For he saw no meaning in Jesus' words that his kingdom was not of this earth.

Despite the dangers threatening him, the Master taught again in the temple the following day. Then he went to the Court of the Women and sat down to rest. Judas sat not far from his Master pondering the difficulties disturbing his mind. Eleazar was right. The only way out was to go to the mighty and try to make peace. If he failed they all would be dead men, Eleazar had said. But Eleazar didn't believe the Master to be the Messiah. If the Master was really the Messiah couldn't he ask his Father to send a host of angels to rescue him? He watched the Master who sat alone, a smile on his face, as if all the struggles and opposition tired neither his heart nor his mind. Near him stood the thirteen shopheroths, the collecting boxes in the shape of horns of plenty, large enough to contain big bags of coins. Judas saw a rich merchant cast a gold piece in one and heard him order his servant to empty the bags with silver and copper coins in it. When he had gone, an old woman shyly put two prutahs in the box, less than an eighth part of the smallest silver piece. The Master rose and praised her for her generosity. Judas was moved as he saw the old woman going away with a blessed expression on her face. Then the Master made ready to go.

Judas rose, too, and went with his Master, discreetly on his left side.

The other disciples did not notice them. They were looking at the new halls of sculptured marble lately added to the temple, the bronze silver-mounted gates and the bunches of grapes above them of pure gold, as large as the body of a full-grown man. While they were staring at the columns and the new mosaics in the Court of the Gentiles, unparalleled in the world, Judas walked next to his Master, a mighty king whose humble servant he himself would be. He would appease his Master's enemies. Then the Master would dwell in his own palace and be treated with the honor due him.

But the Master went on and not once did he look back at the marble steps of the Court of the Priests, or at the twelve steps leading to the Holy of Holies where the golden pinnacles glittered. When he came upon the builders working on the incompleted parts of the temple, he halted and suddenly raised his hand as if banishing a terrifying vision from his mind. The other disciples approached and openly admired the temple. But the Master said solemnly that there would not be left one stone upon another. And Judas in his imagination saw a collapsed temple in a destroyed Jerusalem. The other disciples were startled at the Master's words, but before one of them could ask when these things would be the Master turned away and left the temple.

The disciples asked themselves why all these glorious things should be destroyed. Judas alone understood that the Master had seen how unstable was this mighty temple because those in it did not have true faith in God nor love toward their neighbors.

21

After the last events in the temple it was clear to Judas that the Master would never do anything to escape the dangers threatening him from all sides. It seemed even as if he were seeking his own destruction. The Master was a dreamer whose lofty thoughts moved in other spheres far removed from the realities of life. Not only had he refused to accept the safe shelter which the King of Edessa offered him, but by again chasing the traders out of the temple he had made open conflict with the priests inevitable. Something must be done without delay. Judas was now determined to find a way of mediation. The stranger in Lazarus' garden had said to go to Caiaphas by whom he would be well received. And Eleazar thought the high priest would certainly listen to him, the only Judean among the disciples. Judas would reassure him about the gains in the temple and suggest that the high priest meet the Master himself. Then the high priest would surely see for himself how great was the power of the Master's word and his influence on the people. He would be only too glad to come to a reconciliation with the Master. Hadn't the Master again and again spoken of peace? If the mighty in the temple were willing to make peace, the Master certainly would not refuse the offer. Yet Judas felt heavy at heart when he went in the morning to Herod's former palace where Caiaphas had his offices.

The two Roman sentries took no notice of him. After looking around by himself, he found the rooms of the high priest. The old servant's experienced ear detected the uncertainty in Judas' voice as he said he wanted to speak to the high priest himself. He looked searchingly at Judas, asked his name and profession and shuffled away. Coming back in a hurry, he said his Holiness would receive him immediately.

When Judas entered the room, where the bright daylight was subdued by blinds, Caiaphas met him with a kindly greeting, and said he was happy that Judas had followed his advice so soon. Seeing that Judas did not recognize him, he laughed and said, "We have spoken to one another already—in the garden in Bethany."

Surprised, Judas said, "I did not know I was speaking with his Holiness himself."

"A high priest is forced sometimes to go round and seek in secret for the truth," Caiaphas said. "Did your Master send you to me?"

The blood rushed to Judas' face. "My Master," he stammered. "No. . . ."

"Have you come against his will?"

"My Master doesn't know I am here," Judas said. "But your Holiness must know that there are dangers threatening him."

"Did you come then because you are frightened?"

"I myself am not frightened. But I fear something might happen to my Master and all who depend on him," Judas said. "I thought I could convince you that when my Master rebukes people he does it with good intent."

Caiaphas kept silent, his gaze fixed on Judas. The red disciple had not waited long to come, he reflected. Yet the man seemed uncertain. What did he really want? Would he ask mercy for his Master or would he let him down? Could he be used to destroy the Nazarene? To sound Judas out Caiaphas asked, "Where is your Master at this moment?"

"He is preaching in the temple, your Holiness," Judas said.

"In the temple? Today again? He doesn't seem to fear anything." Caiaphas said in a sharp voice. "Maybe he is again disturbing the peace there and chasing out the people with whips." With satisfaction Caiaphas saw Judas' growing uneasiness. By bullying, the Nazarene's disciple would not be difficult to handle, he thought.

Startled at Caiaphas sharp words, Judas felt he must reassure the high priest concerning the trading in the temple. "Perhaps my Master could be induced to avoid the temple," he said cautiously.

"That is difficult to believe," Caiaphas said. "I have heard your Master listens to nobody. It is impossible to bring such a man to see reason."

Judas was taken aback. He had not expected the high priest to be so reluctant. He must now proceed with the utmost astuteness, otherwise his whole plan would fail. "Your Holiness," he said, "I have come with the purpose of asking you to meet with my Master. I am convinced that if your Holiness speaks to him all differences will be made up. Again there will be friendship and peace among us all."

Caiaphas' gaze was fixed on Judas as he said emphatically, "You want this meeting, not I."

"I want peace, your Holiness," Judas said firmly.

"We all want peace. But tell me, is it true that the Galileans among your Master's followers carry swords with them?"

Feeling Caiaphas' dark eyes fixed on him, Judas said uneasily, "Only two of them have swords, your Holiness."

"Why? One doesn't carry a sword when one only wants to convince the people of the truth with peaceful words."

"My Master himself would forbid the use of swords."

"My friend, one who seeks peace doesn't carry a sword. You know how Galileans are, always ready to take up arms, even in the temple."

"But our followers are peaceful, your Holiness," Judas insisted.

Caiaphas quietly smoothed his curly beard. "We must understand one another, my friend," he said kindly. "We, the priests, are no opponents of your Master. We would like nothing better than to work with him. If we come to an understanding we could give your Master a place of honor that would be worthy of his high calling."

"Does your Holiness really mean that?" Judas asked happily.

"Oh, not out of pure loving-kindness, my friend. It is our own interest. We ourselves wouldn't give a single prutah. The foreign pilgrims must pay for it. There are three millions of them every year."

"And why would the foreign pilgrims bring this offering for my Master?" Judas asked, astonished.

"Why? Your Master makes the dead live again, and nobody wants to die. We are not seeking the greatness of your Master. We want peace for the sake of the temple."

Judas nodded. His head swam. Beaming with kindness Caiaphas said his duties called him elsewhere now, but Judas should come back when he had arranged the meeting with his Master, as he desired. And Caiaphas led him out.

As in a dream Judas walked through the long corridors and then under the shadow of the light green sycomores. Everybody was busy and in a happy mood, calling out good wishes to one another for a happy Passover feast. But Judas walked slowly, worried and in doubt now whether he had really chosen the right way to save his Master.

On the Thursday before the Passover the Master again made an allusion to this feast as the time of his death. Judas had been charged to take care of the paschal lamb. He had chosen the most beautiful lamb in the market, and he thought sadly of Jacob's and Aram's white lambs in the mountain meadows back home. Then he went to a fountain where, as agreed, he found Peter and John, who had been sent out by the Master to look for a room where they could eat the Passover supper. As they entered the house which Peter and John had chosen, nobody was there, not even a servant, which seemed strange to Judas. The Master and the other disciples were coming to Jerusalem after dusk.

Peter and John went to prepare the paschal lamb and Judas remained alone in the upper hall, where the supper would take place. The curtains were still closed against the heat of the day. Suddenly Judas saw a flaming cross on the white wall behind the supper table. Terrified he stared at it, then discovered it was a pattern made by the flaming sunset filtering through some cracks in the curtain at the window. He jerked the curtains apart and the light, streaming into the hall erased the terrifying sign. The full light of the sunset fell on the table where the Master and his disciples would sit. Judas asked himself if the disciples would again come to words over the precedence, without thinking that the Master's very life was in danger. The thought of what was going to happen weighed heavily on Judas, although he was certain that the Master would be saved in some miraculous way. Wouldn't God prevent evil and cause good to be triumphant? Wouldn't the Master, at the last moment, be able to save himself by performing a miracle?

As he stood there, pondering, the door was cautiously opened and young Brodhe shyly came in. She hurried to take his hand. She was frightened. From Mary's words she had guessed that dangers were threatening the Master. Judas reassured her. The Father would surely protect his Son. He himself was ready to give his life for the Master. He saw hope come to her face. She said she would bring him the copper basin they needed to wash their feet. Judas went with her to the courtyard. He washed his feet, then filled a jug with fresh water from the well and carried it with the basin to the upper hall. Leaving his sandals at the entrance he sat down in somber thoughts. Instead of being in Bethany for the Passover they were in a strange house in hostile Jerusalem. His thoughts were interrupted by the sounds of tableware being arranged, and he heard Brodhe say that everything was ready.

After a while the Master came in followed by the disciples, ready for rest and nourishment. Hastily they chose their places and again there were words over the seating. Judas looked at the Master, but he did not utter a word of reproach. He gave Judas a sign to sit next to him.

Only now the Master saw that no servant was present to wash their feet. He rose, laid his garments aside, the simchah as well as the cetoneth, and wrapped a towel about his waist as if he were a simple servant. Judas hurriedly brought the basin and the jug of fresh water. He poured the water and went to wash the Master's feet. But the Master took the basin from his hands and went to Simon Peter, who looked at him in astonishment. He asked in alarm if the Master were going to wash his feet. But the Master told Peter if He did not wash him, he would have no part in Him. Then the Master washed the feet of Simon Peter and the other disciples. Last of all he washed the feet of Judas Iscariot although Judas' feet had been carefully washed already. This was almost intolerable for Judas. While the Master's hands were touching his feet his whole life passed before him, one image after another. Every harsh word he had spoken or thought, every wrong he had ever done was wiped away by the Master's hands. Judas felt his Master's devotion. Was it His will to lift up by His loving care the most lowly of His disciples? Or did the Master cleanse his feet knowing that he had a difficult way to go?

Then Judas heard the Master's words, asking whether they knew what He had done to them. He said he had given them an example that they should follow. And Judas felt humble because the Master himself had taught them to be humble.

The Master wrapped himself again in his white garments and reclined for the meal. John sat on his right and James, John's brother, took his place at the head of the table. But Judas dared to take his place on the Master's left only after he had been beckoned again. The Master had deliberately chosen him, Judas thought. He knew from experience that the Master could read all hidden thoughts and unspoken words. So the Master surely knew that Judas was going to make it impossible for him to go on toward the dangers that threatened Him. Would the Master condemn him for seeking peace with the mighty? Although he knew that Peter once had been reprimanded by the Master for wanting to stave off His hard lot, Judas was convinced he had done the right thing. Suddenly, the Master said he knew whom he had chosen that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

For a moment Judas thought that the Master was speaking of the glory of the Messiah. Then he understood that the Master was speaking again of his approaching death. But the Master must stay alive. The light must not be extinguished, the good must not be overgrown like a green meadow with weeds and thistles. The fertile land must not be flooded by the waves of a destroying sea. The Master must live in glory and blessedness, surrounded by his faithful servants, until everyone understood that he was the king they must follow. He must found the kingdom of light and divine power here on earth. The Master was the light that had driven out the darkness, and the darkness must not extinguish it. Within him rose a cry of distress: *Master, do not leave us. We will save you and elevate you and put you on the throne which is your place.* But the words did not pass his lips.

Then the Master said that one of them would betray him. John, his head leaning on the Master's breast, asked in a soft voice who it was. The Master said it was the one to whom he would give a morsel. He dipped the morsel and gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. Judas felt it burning on his tongue. He heard the Master's words that he should do quickly what he was going to do. He swallowed with difficulty, and slowly the sop went down. He felt suddenly as if he were paralyzed, blind and deaf.

When Judas came to his senses again he was still in the upper hall, full of light, at the holy table in the blessed gathering of the elect. But it was as if a dark cloud were closing in upon him. There was a confused murmur of voices in his ears. He heard Simon and Eleazar and Mary. It was as if they all called to him, "Save Him! Save Him!" But the Master's voice was clearer than the others, saying, "Do it quickly." And these words cut him to the heart. Then the darkness closed about him like a shroud. Within him it was night. Judas went out in the pitch-dark night, craving light.

Not one of the disciples had understood why the Master had said these words to Judas. They thought he had said to go quickly and buy some things that they needed for the feast. They ate of the spices, the unleavened bread, and the paschal lamb.

But Judas hurried alone through the night, as one who is blind, in the delusion that he was going to save the King's life and the kingdom on earth.

As Judas entered Caiaphas' room only a single light was burning. The high priest greeted him as an old friend and offered him a seat. He took a decanter of red wine and poured two glasses. Although he was thirsty Judas drank the wine slowly. It gave him time to think, for suddenly he was uncertain and uncomfortable. What must he tell the high priest? He couldn't possibly say that the Master had sent him away. Then the chance to make peace would be lost. Therefore he said, "Your Holiness, it will be difficult to get my Master to come to you. The only possible way would be to compel him to come."

That was exactly what he wanted, Caiaphas thought gleefully, and the red disciple was the one who must deliver the Nazarene. There was one difficulty. The simpleton seemed to be acting in good faith. He must avoid making him suspicious. "You speak of forcing your Master," Caiaphas said. "But I, as the high priest, do not like violence. Don't forget your Galileans carry swords. We must find a peaceful solution. You may take my word for it that when the Nazarene is in our midst, I shall see to it that he is treated with due respect by all the chief priests and elders of the temple. But I must be certain that I can count on you and that you trust me."

Judas reflected on the high priest's words. Trust him? True, their agreement could be based only on mutual confidence. He looked at Caiaphas. But the high priest was seated in such a way that his face was entirely in the dark. His hands moved between light and shadow, his left hand trifling with a small ivory stick ending at both ends in delicately sculptured hands like an Egyptian magician's wand. Judas said guardedly, "Your Holiness can give me a solemn promise that no harm will come to my Master?"

"That I can promise," Caiaphas said. "We will make an agreement and I will give you a token of my good faith."

Although he could not rid himself of his vague feeling of uncertainty, Judas said politely, "Your Holiness must know, I'm sure, that I trust him."

The high priest nodded. Thoughtfully he took a sip of his wine. Judas' eyes were fixed on the small ivory hands. Was it only his imagination or did they really grow larger? They seemed to be large hands now, as large as human hands. Strangely the high priest's hands also seemed unnaturally large. His throat tightened and he had the oppressive feeling he couldn't escape these hands any more. His eyes half closed against the light as he fought off this attempt to dominate his mind, he tried to discern the expression on Caiaphas' face. The high priest was speaking of the vessels of Moses that were in silver. Did Judas know that silver was the symbol of divine truth?

Judas nodded. The high priest now cautiously opened a small box, took a coin out of it and put it on the table. It was a silver shekel of Jerusalem, a new shekel. The ancient motto "Jerusalem the Holy" and the symbols on it were clearly visible in the light of the lamp. Judas took the shiny coin. Again that uncomfortable feeling of uncertainty rose in him. But Caiaphas, pointing to the symbol on the coin, spoke of the sacred pot of manna that contained spiritual nutriment, the truth Elohim gave to men. Above it was the date of that very year.

Again Judas nodded. But as he looked up from the coin he thought in his sick imagination that something was threatening him, although Caiaphas smiled most graciously. He felt the coin burn between his fingers. On the reverse of it was stamped a branch with three open blossoms. The high priest explained it was Aaron's rod that was kept in the Tabernacle, and out of it had budded forth the threefold blossoming truth. This symbol must be stamped in the hearts of both of them now that they were going to make their covenant.

Suddenly Judas was very much afraid. There seemed to be something wrong. Should he abandon the plan altogether? But then there flashed through his mind the hopeless struggle against the priests, the Herodians, the Pharisees, the rich merchants, the lawyers and the scribes. No, there was no other way than to go ahead and force the Master to make peace. He must no longer hesitate.

The high priest had taken out a platter of olive wood, used for counting money, its left edge decorated with strange sculpture. Judas was startled to see that the design was three hands, one small, the second with an arm, and the third, as in a climax of strength and power, a hand with arm and shoulder. All these hands seemed to grow larger and larger. He looked away at the new silver coins the high priest slowly counted out on the platter. The light falling on them made them shine.

"Here are three times ten silver coins for you, Judas," Caiaphas said. "Three times ten. Three signifies fulness, fulfilment. Elohim created three kingdoms: the stones, the plants and the animals. In the Holy Scripture is written: three gates were at the East, and Jacob saw three herds. Three is the holy number. It is the beginning, the middle and the end, also end, cause and result." Caiaphas pointed with the ivory stick at the three stacks of silver coins. "Three times ten. The number ten contains the covenant with Elohim. Ten are the holy commandments. Ten curtains enclose the Tabernacle. The number ten contains all things of the good and the true. Three times ten is an unbreakable chain. It is the union of truth, goodness, and divine power."

Judas listened to the high priest with the respect born of habit. He saw his delicate fingers run through his curly beard. In a firm voice he said, "Your Holiness gives me these thirty coins as a token of good faith. I, too, will keep the agreement in good faith. When the hour is propitious I will lead you to my Master to make peace." Judas felt Caiaphas' gaze on him.

"And I promise," Caiaphas said, "that I will save not only your Master's life but also his kingdom. His place of honor is already waiting for him, Judas Iscariot."

The high priest had risen now and stood smiling. On his breast he wore a large precious stone that reflected the light of the lamp. Judas was blinded by it. He felt compelled to rise from his chair, too.

"Take the silver pieces, Judas Iscariot, and count them carefully," Caiaphas said. "Make sure that not one is missing. Ten times three."

One by one Judas took up the coins and counted them out in his left hand. Then, slowly, he took his money pouch from the folds of his robe and put the coins in it. He felt relieved it was over with. He had saved his Master's life. He put the purse under his robe and said, "I will guard them carefully."

"Even if you threw them away in the mud of the street, you would still be bound," Caiaphas said. "For the truths acknowledged by you are eternal. The road to your Master's glory is paved now." The high priest put his arm about Judas' shoulders and led him out, telling him to come back in an hour or so. Then they could discuss with the other priests how to arrange the meeting with his Master.

When Judas disappeared Caiaphas went quickly back to his room. He put the silver and the small ivory stick in a drawer. Then he took an earthenware pitcher of clear spring water, poured it in a basin and washed his hands thoroughly, muttering, "The Messiah! A carpenter is he. But his rule is finished. His kingdom will be established on Golgotha." As he wiped his hands, a door was cautiously opened. "Come in," Caiaphas said.

Two priests of the temple who had been waiting in the next room entered. Of course they have been eavesdropping, Caiaphas thought, but probably they were not able to hear everything. "Did you have an important visitor?" one of them asked.

"Very important," Caiaphas smiled, satisfied. "The prophet of Nazareth. . . ."

"*He* was here?" the other interrupted.

"Not he himself; one of his followers."

"And what did he seek here?"

"Judas Iscariot, a disciple of the false Messiah, sold his Lord and Master for a blood money of thirty silver coins."

"Thirty silver coins?" The rabbis were appalled. Such a regal amount was offered only to a general. It was far too much.

"Too much? Why?" Caiaphas asked, indifferently.

The oldest rabbi in a croaking voice answered. "He comes from Kerioth, where nothing will grow. One can buy a man there for one silver coin. And you gave him thirty." He shook his head reproachfully.

"One or two coins were really sufficient," the other rabbi agreed. "Thirty is the price of a learned slave."

"One coin?" Caiaphas smiled. "In reality I bought him for even less. I bought him for what is stamped on it. But even if I had bought him for thirty golden drachmas it still wouldn't have been too much. Jesus of Nazareth!" Caiaphas' fingers stroked his beard, "It is fine game Judas Iscariot is starting. The 'Messiah' will soon be raised to his 'place of honor'."

"His place of honor?" one rabbi asked.

"Oh, I understand," the other said. With his long thin forefinger he made the sign of a cross in the air and grinned.

Coolly, Caiaphas said, "Tell the others that Judas Iscariot will deliver up his Master."

Judas wandered aimlessly through the night. The silver coins pressed against his heart, the chain they formed seemed burdensome. Involuntarily he put his hand where the purse was. What was the matter with him? Every word Caiaphas had said was true. Hadn't he freely accepted the agreement? Wasn't it written in Isaiah that a chain was put on an idol, a chain of pure silver, a symbol of the divine truth? But it had been placed on the idol in order to cause all the falsities to appear truths. Would Caiaphas' chain be like that? No, this was a monstrous mistrust of the high priest. These were whisperings of Satan. His own soul was disturbed. Why was it he felt no joy now the Master was about to be saved? But tomorrow the bright sun of spring would shine again on the festive city. He should banish all doubts from his mind. Yet he felt the silver coins burning on his heart and the symbols of eternal truth brought no peace to his soul.

22

It was the day of Unleavened Bread. Singing psalms, many processions went with lighted torches through the streets of Jerusalem. Everywhere people were seated in the flickering light of the great fires they had built. It was the night of peace and brotherliness. Even strangers were invited to sit down at the fires and partake of the prepared meat. But on one of the squares the song of a passing procession was suddenly hushed and the group scattered in all directions. Those who were seated at the fires near by rose, too, sensing something sinister was going on, for a group of soldiers was approaching. Their cuirasses shone in the light of torches carried by servants of the priests, and in their midst walked a tall man with red hair. With the Romans went the officers of the temple and the guardians of the treasure, armed with heavy cudgels and pointed iron staves. There were also well-known rabbis and even a tribune among the group. They disappeared through the narrow gate to the Kidron valley.

The moon was shining but the valley itself lay in darkness, the slopes being scarcely visible. Now and then a gnarled olive tree loomed up in the flickering torchlight. Judas, walking in the midst of the soldiers, had the feeling of being surrounded like a thief. This was the way Caiaphas had kept his solemn promise! Late that night, when he had come back to the high priest's house, as agreed upon, to his astonishment he saw a group of armed men and some priests of the temple. He asked one of the priests why these soldiers were there. Judas explained that he had only promised the high priest Caiaphas to bring him and the elders to his Master for a peaceful conference. That meant without armed men and certainly not in the dead of night. But the priest said they had no intention of being slaughtered like lambs by the Nazarene's sword-bearers. For a few moments Judas was torn between going with them or abandoning the plan altogether. But he decided to go, for fear that without his mediation worse might happen. The Romans, in their ignorance of who the Master really was, might treat him roughly, although the Master certainly would give no occasion to the priests to call on the soldiers. With anxiety he thought of the Master in the garden of Gethsemane perhaps already aware of an approaching disaster. He had better go on ahead, he thought, and speak to the Master to reassure him. He would convince Jesus that the high priest had no evil intention, but that he wanted to come to an agreement with Him.

As they approached the garden Judas said to the young centurion walking at his side, "I will go in alone. I want to speak in peace with my Master. It is better to leave the armed men behind."

The centurion looked searchingly at Judas. After some whispered words with the tribune, he said, "Go ahead." But as Judas entered the outer garden, the centurion stealthily followed him, his sword in his hand.

Near a hedge Judas halted and peered into the inmost garden. In the moonlight, near by, he saw the Master fallen on his face, deep in prayer. Judas heard him saying, "If this cup cannot pass from me unless I drink it, thy will be done."

Then he rose and Judas saw, to his surprise, an expression of excruciating grief on his face. The Master looked at the three first disciples who had fallen asleep and knew nothing of his suffering. Again Jesus knelt in prayer, as the disciples slept on. Again, Judas thought, they felt no concern about the Master's lot. Did the Master know that Judas had not taken a moment's rest, that he had done everything possible to save Him?

Then the Master rose again and Judas saw clearly his compassion as he bent over to awaken his disciples. Jesus said that they should rise and go with him, for he who was to betray him was near. Hearing these words that sounded like a judgment, Judas stood motionless for some moments. Then he rushed into the inner garden and kissed the Master on the cheek. He tried to tell the Master that he had not come to betray but to take him to the high priest to make peace. But he could not make himself heard above the sudden tumult of approaching soldiers and the fearful shouts of the disciples.

"Look, John, they are coming," Peter cried, seizing his sword. "I am ready."

John stared in mortal fear at the onrushing horde whose swords and staves glittered in the torchlight. Pointing at Judas, he said, "It is Judas, Judas who brought them here."

In the general confusion Judas, as if seeking support, looked from one to another. Above the uproar, he heard Peter shouting, "Judas has betrayed us." He stood breathless. Betrayed, betrayed. Even the Master had used this word. It was all the fault of the rabbis who had brought this armed horde rushing into the garden.

The Master stood calmly facing the soldiers, his disciples behind him. Going into the sphere of torchlight he asked whom they sought?

"Jesus the Nazarene," they shouted.

And the Master said, "I am he."

Peace shone in the Master's eyes, Judas saw. Without fear he stood a few paces in front of his followers as if to protect them. Priests and elders seemed astonished and frightened. Some fell back. Others, afraid, hesitated and whispered to one another.

The Master asked again whom they were seeking?

Many said, "Jesus the Nazarene."

If they sought only him, they should let the others go, said Jesus. Judas understood that it was the sign that their task was ended, that the disciples should seek their own safety now. At this moment the rabbis, the Jewish officers and the temple guards burst out shouting and raised their clubs and staves. Peter, in his excitement, drew his sword and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant.

The Master told Peter to put his sword into the sheath. Should he not drink the cup his Father had given him?

Standing in the midst of those who threatened him he spoke to calm them. Touching the ear of the high priest's servant he healed it. Judas heard him ask why they had come out with swords and staves? Looking at the confused group in the reddish torchlight, he reminded them that he had been with them day after day in the temple and they had not touched him; but this was their hour, and the power of darkness. They were speechless and ashamed.

At these words the last hope in the hearts of the disciples failed and they fled as sheep from the wolves. Still the Master stood motionless, his hand raised, and the armed band hesitated. Then he dropped his hand in a gesture of resignation.

Commands sounded. The tribune and the priests seized him. The Roman commander ordered his hands to be bound in back, but Judas protested, referring to Caiaphas' promise that his Master would go freely to his meeting with the high priest. The Roman shrugged. The hands could be bound in front; it did not matter.

The Master strode on, deep in thought. Some of the priest's servants looked hesitantly at him, impressed by his incomprehensible words about a father who gave his son a cup to drink. Some watched him with compassion. A servant who held the rope with which the Master was bound suddenly sensed that this was indeed a holy man, abandoned by all. Even his followers had left him. Yet he seemed to have no bitterness in his heart. He turned to a Roman guard next to him, and told him to take the rope. The soldier protested but the servant repeated, "You take it. Where you take this man is your business, not mine." And the servant left the group as it walked on through the night.

All this time Judas had been trying to draw near the Master, but the temple guards and Roman soldiers pushed him back. As the Master entered Annas' palace, a rabbi turned to Judas, "You may go now. You have received your reward already. We do not need you any longer."

Beside himself with fury, Judas tried to force his way into the palace. The soldiers pushed him back with the shafts of their lances, but he remained near the door, pondering how to slip inside. He heard somebody speak of a court from which Annas' house could be entered and hurried away to find it.

Going to the other side of the palace Judas came to a courtyard where groups of men whom he recognized as the priest's servants stood near blazing fires, warming themselves. This must be the place, he thought. Slowly he entered the courtyard. He felt tired and cold, but he did not want to go to one of the big fires with the priest's servants. Shivering he remained standing in the dark not far from the entrance. This was the darkest night of his life. Nothing had come about as he had planned.

A guard threw a big log on a dying fire in a remote corner of the court. As the flames flared up Judas saw the familiar figure of Peter bending over it to warm himself. For a moment Peter's face was clearly visible. Despite the terrible accusation Peter had leveled at him, Judas felt less alone. But he hesitated to go near him.

At this moment one of the high priest's servants approached Peter and said, "Didn't I see you in the garden with him?"

A rough hand pushed Peter unexpectedly into the center of the light. Judas saw an expression of mortal fear on Peter's face and hardly recognized his voice as Peter began to curse and exclaimed, "I do not know the man."

At the same time a cock crowed shrill and loud, piercing all other sounds. Peter, his eyes wild with terror, raised his hands to his head as if to ward off a blow. At that moment the palace gate opened and, surrounded by armed temple guards and priests, the Master came out, bound with a rope. His eyes rested on Peter, yet there was no reproach in his gaze, only compassion and forgiveness for the disciple who had denied him. Judas stood motionless, and suddenly the Master was gone, pushed on to the hall of judgment. Judas begged one of the rabbis for permission to follow his Master. But the man ordered him to stay in the court until he was called.

Turning back Judas saw Peter still standing in the same spot near the fire. He held a corner of his cloak over his face and wept bitterly. As Judas approached he heard Peter mutter, "Three times, three times. He warned me. And yet I denied him."

Touching Peter's shoulder Judas said in a soft voice, "Simon Peter. . . ."

"Judas Iscariot!" Peter exclaimed and drew back as if attacked by a poisonous snake. His eyes were glassy and his cheeks sunken. He turned to go.

Judas barred the way. "Peter! Use the power of your word, and God will help us save the Master."

"You would save the Master now?" Peter said, "after what you have done? How could we ever have trusted you?"

"I will go into the judgment hall. Go with me, Peter," Judas implored him. "I did not intend to betray him. Believe me, Peter. I can explain it all to you. But now, I beseech you, go with me to defend our Master. We must be courageous against the wolves."

Then the cock crowed again. In the pale light of dawn, Peter's sick face twisted with pain. "Get away from me! You'll deliver me up to be killed too!" Pulling his hood over his head, Simon Peter fled from the courtyard.

Despair in his eyes, Judas watched him go. He could not be angry with Peter for calling him a traitor after what had happened. But Peter should have listened to his explanation. Now the first disciple, who had said he wanted to die with the Master, was fleeing like a hunted deer.

The atmosphere was suffocating as Judas made his way to the judgment hall. His tongue was glued to his palate. The morning light was too bright for his tired eyes which had not closed for so many hours. Judas longed to lie down and order his thoughts. Perhaps then he could find a way to wrest these terrible events back to the track he had intended. He felt crushed and useless, as if some giant hand had brushed him aside once he had made the mediation possible. But was there to be any mediation? As he contemplated the actions of the rabbis, despair began to take hold of Judas in earnest.

When he arrived at a side entrance, Judas found that the temple guards were too engrossed in the proceedings to care about him. Leaning heavily against a pillar near the door, Judas heard Caiaphas as in a dream.

The high priest was questioning a witness about what the miracle-worker had said concerning the destruction of the temple.

The witness answered that he had heard, "I am able to destroy the temple of God."

Then another witness said he had heard, "I will destroy this temple."

Judas listened to these conflicting lies with a sick feeling of desperation. By slightly twisting the Master's words, they changed their meaning. Cunningly Caiaphas distorted further the words of these witnesses in order to convince the members of the Sanhedrin of the Master's blasphemy.

Jesus of Nazareth listened in silence as the witnesses entangled themselves. A mysterious power seemed to go forth from him. His gaze went slowly over the witnesses and the judges. It seemed to Judas as if the Master's silence was an accusation—as if Annas, the mighty, and Caiaphas, the cautious one, were now the accused. It was as if their poisoned arrows rebounded from an invisible shield that protected the Master.

Annas and Caiaphas saw that the witnesses were not capable of destroying this simple preacher from Nazareth. It was intolerable. Would this Nazarene really be protected in a miraculous way; Caiaphas wasn't so sure any more.

Annas, irritated, sprang up from his seat. But he changed his mind and, after casting a reproachful glance at his son-in-law who slyly looked at him, he sank back in his chair, leaving the floor to Caiaphas. Caiaphas now entered the circle. He was deathly pale and Judas saw beads of sweat on his forehead. His face distorted with anger, he asked why the Master did not reply to the witnesses.

Still Jesus did not answer. A voice in the crowd cried to burn him with a red-hot iron if he wouldn't speak, but

Caiaphas ordered silence with a motion of his hand. Under the stern gaze of Annas, Caiaphas raised his hands in exasperation above his head and adjured the Master to tell them if he were the Christ, the Son of God.

The Son of God? These words made the crowd shudder. In complete tranquility Jesus looked at Caiaphas. And Judas knew that his Master was going to speak now. His words would be like a sudden storm, loud as thunderclaps echoed by numberless mountains. But the Master's voice was soft as he said. "Hereafter shall you see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven."

For a short moment Caiaphas was surprised. The unexpected had happened at last. He cast a meaningful look at Annas whose face was like a grim mask and whose croaking voice uttered only one word, "Blasphemy."

Then it was over. The victory was theirs. Like a bad actor making exaggerated gestures Caiaphas shouted that no more witnesses were needed, for they all had heard his blasphemy. With wild jerks the high priest ripped his white linen robe (of which the seams had been opened beforehand). Turning to the members of the Sanhedrin he asked, "What is your judgment?"

"Guilty," they said unanimously. "He deserves death."

Covering his eyes Judas supported his head against the doorpost. Then he was startled by the circle of judges breaking up. They ran to the Master and spit in his face and struck him with their hands crying, "Prophesy unto us, you Messiah, who was it that struck you?"

His fists clenched Judas started to force his way into the hall, but the guards barred him with their pointed staves. "Be cursed, you murderers!" Judas shouted. The door was shut against him. Slowly he went away, broken in soul and body. God had not sent his angels to protect the Master.

23

As Pontius Pilate opened his eyes early Friday morning a feeble light filtered through the curtains. In Jerusalem there was never the morning haze from the sea, as in Caesarea. In long sleepless hours that night he had weighed the results of his stay in Judea. It certainly had not been successful. He had come to the conclusion that in this land everything was wrong: purposes, desires and all the things of daily life. Everything was the opposite of what a Roman could appreciate. Judea was a cursed land with its incomprehensible religion, its poisonous intrigues, and its active or passive resistance that exhausted him. His protector Lucius Aelnis Sejanus had told him at his nomination as Procurator that he should never be weary of accomplishing all he could for Rome and Caesar. Now he had to admit that invariably he had been forced to give in. He had believed in ruling, like a true Roman, with a strong hand. He had the legions with the standards of Caesar march into Jerusalem and he had been forced to put up with indignities and finally to bow before the fanatic will of these miserable people. Since that defeat his profound dislike of Judea had never left him. Even prominent Jews had spoken in Aramaic in his presence and had taken the liberty of making jibes he could not understand. The former high priest, Annas, had refused to welcome him at his arrival in Caesarea on the pretext of being sick. Later when he had asked him in Latin how his health was, Annas had answered in Aramaic that his health was good only so long as he was not in the neighborhood of a Roman. The loud laughter of the other Jews had told Pilate Annas was ridiculing him. Time and again something went the rounds making him everybody's laughingstock. Once when he talked about it to Danio he had been told that the old Annas, deprived of his function and honor, had a childish desire to make himself popular by witticisms. On the other hand both the priests did keep the people in hand, so the Romans did not have to use the troops.

But he had had his revenge in the matter of the aqueduct. He remembered with malicious joy how he had seized by surprise a chest full of gold destined for the temple when the Jews had refused to pay their part of the cost of the aqueduct. Aware that they would be openly opposed to it he had put Samaritans, Idumeans, and other auxiliaries into civilian clothes and armed them with daggers and clubs. They had taken this opportunity to give vent to their hatred of the Jews. This small revenge was his one and only satisfaction. On the other hand in the quarrel about the gilded shields he had again suffered a defeat. Agrippa, that Jewish schemer, had convinced Caesar that these decorations were put in Herod's palace with the intention of offending the Jews. He had had to take them away and put them in the Temple of August.

To end these unfruitful meditations Pilate rose and dressed. He went outside on the portico where, despite the scarcity of water in Jerusalem, the fountains were in full play. From the terrace he had a picturesque view of the city with its high rising towers, ancient walls, and glittering roofs. With bitterness he thought of the splendor of the halls in the Praetorium, where real friends were absent. His guests from Rome were mostly informers. His sojourn in this palace had never been peaceful. Now he had received information about a scheme of Annas against the preacher of Nazareth. This Nazarene had indeed caused some restlessness in Jerusalem, but the reports of his secret informers were not alarming. They made mention only of a religious conflict unduly magnified by the priests.

He smiled as he thought of what Claudia had told him of this Nazarene. She had seen him preaching to the people once near the Sea of Galilee. She was captivated by him. She said he seemed to have an aura of mysterious perfection about him. He couldn't be an ordinary Jewish citizen; he was quite different from the conceited rabbis, the proud patricians, and the loud merchants she had seen thus far. The Nazarene's voice had made an extraordinary impression upon her, although she had to have his words interpreted for her. Pilate smiled again as he recalled Claudia's strange idea that this man surely knew the secret of life, all the secrets of the earth and of heaven and of eternity. Danio, her interpreter, had explained to her what the Nazarene meant by the kingdom that was at hand, where all men would be brothers and slaves would be free. He, Pilate, knew only too well what that meant. The masters would be slaves of the slaves, or they would be killed by them. Simpletons with good intentions, as this Nazarene seemed to be, always caused confusion. It was surprising that Rufus' Jewish secretary was also on the side of the preacher. This reminded him that he had summoned Danio to come early in the morning to talk about this matter. Reluctantly he went inside.

When Danio came in, Pilate's first question was what the members of the Sanhedrin were up to in the case of the Nazarene, and what they expected of the Procurator.

"They will certainly not come to the Procurator for the administration of justice," Danio said. "They will come with this man sentenced to death already, the rope around his neck. They will demand that the Procurator be their executioner and put the man, condemned by them, on the cross, naturally with the sly idea of eventually putting the blame on the Procurator." Danio cast a side glance at Pilate.

"But in any case I will have to listen to them."

"Not one of them will enter the palace, Procurator. They fear to be contaminated for the Passover."

"Then I shall have to go to them," Pilate said.

"If the Procurator so desires," Danio said coldly.

At that moment the centurion on guard came to announce that a group of priests and armed temple officers were approaching, the preacher of Nazareth in their midst. Looking outside Pilate saw the priests and scribes. The Nazarene was bound with thick rope. Danio had been right. They brought to him one sentenced to death, not one accused.

"The priests have put on their blue tassels interwoven with gold," Danio said. "It is the symbol that they are holy before God and carry the truth with them."

Pilate looked at Danio. "And you, a Jew, are questioning that?"

"If only the Procurator would believe neither in their holiness nor in their truth, but put a stop to their schemes!"

The prisoner was taken to the hall of judgment. As the Procurator entered, accompanied by Marcus Rufus, Danio, and his centurions, he saw a tranquil figure standing there. So this was Jesus of Nazareth, the preacher of whom Claudia had spoken so often. Opposite him stood some of his accusers, impatient and belligerent. Pilate felt their cunning gaze fixed on him. But the Roman's proud face showed no emotion as he stepped outside on the terrace where stood the dignitaries of the temple in the attitude of mighty men receiving an underling. An excited mob thronged the steps to the terrace.

At a glance Pilate took in the situation. The secretary had been right. They had come not for justice, but for an execution. He should be very cautious. He had no quaestor at his disposal and he himself had to question the prisoner. In a haughty voice he asked, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" His head raised, warlike in his close-fitting Roman tunic, he challenged the priests with his eyes.

For a moment silence prevailed. This was the most dangerous question Pilate could ask. What was this sly Roman pagan after, the Jews wondered. Hadn't they themselves passed sentence already? It was Caiaphas who answered in an outraged voice that if the man were not a malefactor they would not have delivered him up to the Procurator.

Pontius Pilate looked down contemptuously on the mighty of the temple and said that the priests should take the man and judge him according to their own law.

Caiaphas replied that it was not lawful for them to put a man to death. The Procurator had only to order that he be crucified.

"Am I your executioner?" Pilate asked sarcastically.

Several ruffians in the crowd shouted, "Crucify him! Death to the Nazarene!"

Caiaphas ordered silence. He stated that the priests had heard that this man perverted the people; he forbade them to pay tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself was Christ, the king.

"He calls himself the Son of God, and he is only the son of a carpenter!" someone in the crowd shouted.

Caiaphas smiled, satisfied, his eyes on Pilate.

"Not a shred of evidence of the man's guilt have I heard as yet from witnesses," Pilate said sharply. "Therefore, I will go in and question the prisoner myself." He gazed over the crowd. He had only a limited number of troops in Jerusalem. He made a movement with his hand as if to speak. Then he thought better of it and entered the hall of judgment.

He found the condemned man awaiting his fate in complete resignation. He radiated dignity and purity. "Are you the king of the Jews?" Pilate asked. To his surprise the accused questioned in return whether the Procurator asked this for himself or had someone else suggested it. "Am I a Jew?" Pilate said. "Your own people and the chief priests have delivered you to me. What have you done?"

Jesus said only, "My kingdom is not of this world."

Pontius Pilate realized then that this man did not long for earthly power, but for some unknown kingdom, existing somewhere. There was no mockery in his voice as he asked, "And yet you *are* a king?"

Jesus answered. "You say that I am a king. To this end I was born, for this cause I came into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. . . ."

"Ah," said Pilate, thinking of his precarious political position and the incomprehensible wrangles of these Jews, "What is truth?"

When the prisoner did not answer this question, Pilate turned and went back to the priests. Standing in a stern attitude, like a general giving orders, he said, "I find no fault in him, no fault at all."

He could see that his words only fed the fury of the priests. It gave him a certain grim satisfaction that they should find him such a difficult tool in their schemes.

Someone shouted, "Crucify him! He has enflamed the whole of Galilee!"

Galilee? Pilate remembered that the prophet was a Galilean. So—here was a way to escape all responsibilities. He had no right to judge a Galilean. This right belonged exclusively to the Tetrarch. Herod Antipas was now in Jerusalem for the Passover. For a change, Pilate mused, it would be a pleasure to respect the Tetrarch's rights.

Then in a loud voice Pilate made known his decision. Herod was the only competent judge. He ordered Marcus Rufus to take the prisoner immediately to him.

Of course, he should have known the solution of his dilemma was not to be so easily reached, Pilate thought when he heard the report of Marcus Rufus after his return from Herod's palace. The Tetrarch had not sentenced the Nazarene, but had given him a gorgeous robe instead, mocking him for his claim to kingship. Rufus showed his superior the golden dagger he had received in token of Herod's friendship.

"He is a sly one, the Tetrarch," Pilate said thoughtfully. "He throws the responsibility back upon me." Pilate ordered Rufus to take all precautionary measures against rioting. Moreover he told them to put on the terrace not the bema but the golden throne of Archelaus. He wanted to impress those Jews with suitable pomp.

Pilate pondered the strange situation. The Nazarene remained an enigma to him. The priests would surely start a tumult, perhaps a riot. They had thoroughly stirred up the mob. But in case the situation became too explosive he could still give in. He saw the slaves putting the golden throne on the mosaic floor of the terrace. He would let them wait now, the mighty of the temple. His own wavering strengthened his grudge against them. The very thought of being used as a tool by these bloodthirsty schemers was repulsive to him. Finally, he went outside, walked slowly to his throne and sat down solemnly without greeting anybody, not even the high priest. Seeing that Caiaphas was about to make a speech he forestalled him by asking where the delegate of the Sanhedrin was. Gamaliel, visibly against his will, came forward and Pontius Pilate asked him curtly what the judgment of the Tetrarch was.

"The Tetrarch knows that according to our laws the accused must die, for he has called himself God's Son," Gamaliel said, sidestepping Pilate's question.

"Did the Tetrarch say that?"

Gamaliel gazed uncertainly at Pilate on his golden throne.

"For the third time, I ask you whether the Tetrarch has found the prisoner guilty or innocent?"

Caiaphas said quickly that the priests, the rulers over the people, and the people themselves had found him guilty. With a broad gesture he called the crowd to witness. They cheered him loudly.

Pilate's pale face was red with anger. "I'm not asking your opinion," he said, "I am asking for the judgment of the Tetrarch."

Gamaliel looked helplessly at Caiaphas. Voices began, "Crucify him, crucify him!" and the mob joined in.

"You hear the people's judgment, Procurator," Caiaphas said, shrugging.

"Command them to be silent," Pilate said impatiently and turned to Marcus Rufus. "Commander, what was the Tetrarch's judgment?"

"The Tetrarch found no cause to condemn him to death," Rufus answered. A silence fell over the square.

"Quite. This Prophet of Nazareth is a Galilean. The Tetrarch alone has the right to judge him. I, as a Roman, must respect the law."

A wild tumult broke out in the mob. The soldiers had to step in to restore order. The priest's accomplices were trying to attain their end by rioting, Pilate thought somberly. He did not fear the fighting, but he shrank from shedding blood, for this time it would certainly cost him his Procurator's seat. From his chief, Vitellius, he could no longer expect any support. And Macro, Sejanus' mighty successor, would surely avail himself of this opportunity to ruin him. Even his friend Seneca would not be able to protect him against Caesar Tiberius' sickly suspicions and the schemes of the Jews in Rome. No, weapons must not be used this time. He should keep all thoughts of justice out of consideration and skilfully avoid pronouncing the Nazarene guilty or not guilty. He must not pass any sentence at all, he must simply pardon the Nazarene.

The mob in the square had been restored to order now. A slave came to Pilate and gave him a small letter. Unrolling it, the Procurator saw it was Claudia's fine handwriting. Impatiently and unwillingly he read: *Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of him.* How did she dare disturb him on his judgment seat! Extremely annoyed he put the letter in Marcus Rufus' hand who glanced at it and thrust it into his tunic. The Procurator should act now, Marcus Rufus urged. Hesitation would make the situation only worse.

In the square people in the crowd shouted, "The Procurator hates us. He has contempt of our laws and our rights. He wants to force us to resist and then slaughter us." Caiaphas, observing the Procurator's uncertainty, wanted to force Pilate to commit himself and suddenly ordered silence, for the Procurator was going to speak.

Pontius Pilate rose, came down from his throne and stood at the top of the stairs leading to the square. He should remain seated, Rufus thought, annoyed—in his full splendor, above the plebes, looking down at them with contempt. Why didn't he let them shout till they were tired? But Pilate stood like a general before a rebellious army. In a mighty voice he said, "I have always respected your laws, your rights, and your customs. You have an ancient custom which in the course of the years has become a right. At the Passover the Procurator may release a prisoner to the people. Since you insist the prophet of Nazareth is a prisoner, I set him free according to your own law."

Furiously the crowd shouted, "Away with the false king, stone him, crucify him."

Caiaphas beckoned for silence. "It must be known to the Procurator," he said, "that only the priests and the people themselves can decide which prisoner shall be set free. And this time our choice falls on Barabbas."

Pilate frowned. "Barabbas is a murderer and a thief," he said.

Caiaphas, fearing that an outburst from the Procurator might influence the crowd, said in honeyed words that the Procurator surely would respect the law, and leave the choice to the people who would judge wisely and righteously. Again Caiaphas made a broad gesture to the crowd. And they answered loudly, "Free Barabbas. Free Barabbas!"

"Doesn't this innocent preacher merit pardon by your righteous people?" Pilate said sarcastically. In order to give the Nazarene's adherents the opportunity to speak up he asked, "And what must I do with Jesus of Nazareth?"

"Flagellate him, crucify him," the mob shouted, drowning out Judas' voice and the voices of the other believers.

Suddenly Pilate had an idea. If he had the Nazarene flogged it could be considered a questioning with torture. If the accused did not confess he could properly set him free. Calmly he said to Rufus, "Have the Nazarene flogged." Rufus stared at him, astonished and waited a moment as if he expected Pilate to countermand this order. But Pilate turned away.

Judas had pushed through the crowd till he stood close to the priests. He saw Pilate looking down contemptuously on the mighty of the temple and he heard the sarcastic words the Procurator spoke to them. There was still a spark of justice in this Roman, Judas thought, and the hope of a favorable turn revived in his heart. As the Roman commander came back to report that the Tetrarch found no cause to condemn the Master, Judas saw a smile of satisfaction break on the Procurator's stern face. And when the Procurator announced he would set the prophet of Nazareth free, Judas burst out in loud cheers. The Master's life was saved! True, it was not a real judgment by which the Master had been declared innocent. But this was only of secondary importance, Judas thought, so long as the Master was free.

Then, more furiously than before, the crowd started shouting to crucify the Nazarene and set Barabbas free. And the Procurator didn't seem to be so sure of himself any longer as he spoke in a low voice with the commander. To his horror, Judas saw the Master led away to be scourged. Now everything was lost. There was not going to be any justice! Even the mighty Roman, who wanted to see justice done, was forced to yield to the dark power of the priests.

The clothes of the Master were torn off and thrown indifferently in a heap. His hands were fastened to a post. One of the strongest soldiers had picked up a scourge, boasting he would lay the prisoner low in a few strokes. Rufus called him to order, threatening him with punishment if the man's face were hurt. The scourge had strong leather thongs with little pieces of lead at the end and sharp points of ivory to tear the flesh apart. When the order to start was given, the soldier raised his arm and the scourge came down, drawing three bloody lines on the Master's back. Again the horrible sound, and there were new lines of blood—again and again. The Master's mysterious power to endure this suffering stimulated the soldiers. They enjoyed torturing a prominent Jew.

Danio could bear it no longer. "This isn't flagellation," he snapped at Rufus. "It's murder!"

Then Marcus Rufus, embittered that he, a soldier, had been involved in this torturing, ordered an end to it. He commanded that King Herod's robe be put on the man again. One of the soldiers said it was too good for a shroud; it could be sold for wine. But Rufus scowled so menacingly that the man hastily put the robe on Jesus' shoulders.

"Take another robe from the Praetorian wardrobe," a decurion ordered. Some moments later the soldier returned, a broad grin on his face. He carried an old scarlet paludamentum, a cast-off war cloak, with a purple laticlave and glittering clasps, and this he placed on Jesus' shoulders. With this royal robe belonged a crown, the soldiers said. Caesar had a laurel-wreath, but this one would have a far more beautiful crown. From thorny bushes they tore off enough light branches to make a crown which they put on the Master's head. For a scepter they put a reed in his bound hands. Barely covered they were going to lead him away. But Rufus shouted that they were to put clothes on the prisoner. Then they put his undergarments on him and replaced the reed in his bound hands.

This was the way Pontius Pilate saw him come back, Herod's gorgeous robe red with blood under the frayed purple war cloak. From under the crown of thorns the blood trickled down his face. Yet, Pilate thought, he could still save the prophet's life. Going to His side he ordered silence. "Behold, I bring him before you that you may know I find no fault in him." Looking at the Prophet again he saw his eyes like stars in the pale, suffering face and said, "Behold the man!"

A tumult broke out. No fault? The Procurator, the cursed heathen, had found no fault in him! Unanimously they shouted, "Crucify him, crucify him!"

Judas looked around at the people near him. Their faces were full of hatred and cruelty. Now he understood why the Master had wept over this city! If the Lord God would only send his angels upon this mob to still its wrath and confuse its purpose!

But the uproar continued in the square, with men shoving and cursing and shouting at the Romans. Judas felt his anger rise. Furiously he stared at these miserable tools of the high priest's murderous scheme. Instead of the angels of the Lord, he wished for all the devils from hell to come and devour this crowd. He groaned and closed his eyes in a helpless longing for revenge.

When he looked again, the Master, his brow red with blood, was still standing there elevated above the fierce rabble. There was the same look of sublime resignation on his face as when he stood before the Sanhedrin. For an uneasy moment Judas felt that more was involved here than just righteousness and unrighteousness, something that was part of a larger plan. Was it possible that the Master was seeing things his Father revealed to him? But the moment passed. Then it seemed to Judas that perhaps the Lord had indeed sent his angels. Only they had come not to punish the mob but to support the Master in his time of need.

Twelve Roman soldiers, lances in hand, arrived with Barabbas in their midst. In chains, and filthy from the dungeon, he blinked at the mob, still unaccustomed to the bright light of day. In the yellow, bloated face lay eyes deep in their sockets like animal eyes. At the sight of Barabbas the crowd broke out in cheers. Pilate could no longer remain seated when he saw the criminal. He sprang up, but felt he couldn't speak to this brute. He asked Caiaphas to speak to him, but the high priest ordered the rabbi of the court to question Barabbas.

The rabbi, speaking loudly so that all in the square could hear him, said, "The people have called you, Barabbas. They will free you. I ask you now before the priests and the people if you sincerely repent your sins."

There was a twinkling in Barabbas' eyes. Then he gazed over the crowd as if he would fathom its mood. "Answer me calmly," the rabbi said.

"Most reverend Sir, I feel deeply repentant. I will better my life and do penance with aid of the Almighty. I will bring offerings to the temple and the priests in gold, three times. I fear the Lord and I have always honored the priests. But I also honor the people who love righteousness." He peered round, a grin on his face.

Then the crowd burst out in enthusiastic shouts, "Hail, Barabbas! Hail!"

Caiaphas signalled for silence, and Barabbas said in a still louder voice, "As an offering to the temple I will also bring a beautiful ox with golden horns."

"Bought with money from theft and murder," someone cried.

"Silence!" Caiaphas shouted.

"We must always keep silent while the robbers are protected," another man shouted.

"Give the assassin a seat in the Sanhedrin. There's where he belongs!"

Many in the crowd laughed loudly, others shouted, there was some fighting, and the temple guards used their clubs. The rabbi motioned Barabbas to speak. "I will give," he said "to the people two oxen, three even, to be roasted on the spit and to divide among them."

"Hail Barabbas, release Barabbas!" they cried. "Crucify the Nazarene, release Barabbas!" The sound echoed from the high walls of the Praetorium. Pilate's gaze glided over the priests and came to rest on Jesus.

"Shall I crucify your king?" the Procurator asked the chief priests.

"We have no king but Caesar," Caiaphas answered.

At that moment Pilate knew every word he said might bring about his downfall. If the mighty Jews in Rome and Capri could accuse him before Caesar Tiberius of lese majesty he was lost. Sejanus was no longer there to protect him. "You ask for the release of Barabbas, although he is a murderer. Yet I will honor your rights. I will set him free, but also the Nazarene."

The rabbi of the court said, "Noble Lord Procurator, the people's ancient rights do not permit a second prisoner to be released."

For a moment Pilate was undecided.

Caiaphas added, "If you let this man go, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who tries to make himself a king speaks against Caesar."

"Procurator," the rabbi of the court said now, "we and all with us honor Caesar." Turning to the crowd he waited a moment, and promptly their accomplices shouted, "Hail to our emperor, the noble Caesar Tiberius."

Caiaphas smiled triumphantly, his eyes on Pilate, awaiting his word. Pilate deliberated, still seeking a way out, lost if anything went wrong. His protector had been killed as a traitor and Caesar Tiberius, withdrawn to Capri, had fallen into insane cruelty. And again Caesar's name was mentioned. There must be secret delators of Tiberius in the mob. He thought of Claudia Procula whose fate was also being decided now. The words of the Law of the Twelve Tables crossed his mind, "The empty shouts of the mob must not be heeded." Was he to be forced to release a murderer and execute an innocent man? Then, he suddenly heard Marcus Rufus' impatient voice, "The Procurator has given to this more than three hours. He is free to decide as he thinks best. All measures against rioting have been taken."

"Rioting?" Pilate repeated the word automatically. But he was trying to administer justice. He was determined not to use force. The die was cast. He knew now that he was forced by the circumstances to give in.

He asked that water be brought to him, and he washed his hands before the multitude. His voice resounded over the square, "I am innocent of the blood of this righteous man, see you to it."

The crowd answered, "His blood be on us and on our children."

Then Pontius Pilate delivered Jesus to them.

"To the cross!" yelled the mob.

Pilate, his eyes fixed on the basin, continued to wash his hands as if he could not remove the stain.

24

Through the narrow winding streets of Jerusalem marched the procession. In the midst of a shouting, pushing crowd Judas strode on as in a horrible dream. His feet moved automatically. He felt exhausted and helpless. Why must the Master offer his life? Why wouldn't he who had called Lazarus back from the dead perform a miracle and strike down his enemies? In despair he followed the suffering figure bent under the burden of the cross.

An old man walking next to Judas said to him, "God gave him power. He healed me from my sickness and now I must look, helpless, while they put him on the cross."

"I was blind and he made me see," shouted another. "But when I was blind I got alms. Now I am poor, and they have even threatened to gouge out my eyes, so that no miracle would have happened. It would have been better if I had never met him."

At these words Judas turned away, horrified. He no longer had the heart to witness the Master's suffering. He fell behind. He saw Caiaphas attired like a king, pompously striding forward surrounded by temple guards. It was more than Judas could bear. He fled down a small twisting street away from the crowd. They were all against the Master, even those he had healed from their sickness. There was to be no mercy for him.

Judas stopped. The Master on a cross. His hands torn, and his feet, and the drained corpse thrown to the vultures and hyenas. Judas covered his eyes. How had he ever been so foolish as to think that he, the last of the disciples, could lead the Master in the path he should follow. Judas put his hands to his head to still the tumult there, and set off once more down the narrow street.

How had it happened? How had his good intentions led to this disaster? Judas tried to steady his thoughts. Where had he made his mistake? But it was almost impossible to think. Black waves of anguish and confusion and despair washed over him, as he recalled his efforts to understand the Master and the repeated frustrations he had felt. Now the Master was going to die, and Judas would never be able to see the light again.

Why had the other disciples let the Master pursue his reckless course to the end? If only he had been more careful not to arouse such fierce enmity. The Master should have spoken in his own behalf when he stood before the Sanhedrin, rather than saying the very thing they could use against him. He should have defended himself before Pilate and the Tetrarch. Nobody had checked the onslaught of disaster. John had fled, and even Peter. Then a thought came to Judas that made him numb. He himself had set the whole catastrophe in motion. In his self-conceit he had imagined that he could be a mediator between the powers of darkness and the Master in whom was the light of heaven. It was not the others who had failed, but he, Judas Iscariot, who had brought the Master to the cross. Panting for breath Judas supported himself against the wall.

Somebody touched his arm, and as from afar Judas heard a voice he dimly recognized, saying, "Judas, son of Simon, you look ill and tired. Come into my house and rest."

It was his father's friend who, putting his arm about Judas' shoulder, took him into the house to a quiet room. Judas saw it was the same room where he had been so happy to see his parents again during the Feast of Tabernacles. The friend brought him a pitcher of cool water and left him alone to rest.

Judas sat down on a couch, his gaze fixed in front of him. Staring at the pale light that filtered in through the curtain, he saw himself as he really was, stripped of all the virtues he had attributed to himself. He had believed himself to be the only one among the disciples who truly loved the Master and was ready to give his life for him. But now he saw that his love for the Master had been possessive, without any humility in it or self-denial. There had not been the humble offering of himself, which alone constitutes true love. He had not truly placed his hope and faith in the Master. Never had he said from the bottom of his heart, "Only you are just, my Master."

Sometimes he had not clearly understood the Master's words. But often, when he did, he had not been willing to be led by His teachings. The other disciples had accepted them as glorious gifts. He had not overcome his self-will, and he had been wholly concerned with earthly things. Yes, he had gathered the copper coins and silver pieces for his money bag, but he had not seen the Master's golden treasure which never perishes.

The thought that he had overcome the fierce passions burning within him had filled him with pride. He had not been obedient to his Master's will, he had followed not the Master's way, but his own. In his pride he had thought he walked the way of righteousness and could pass judgment upon others. But now he remembered in one searing instant the many times the Master had talked of righteousness and never once mentioned the law. In fact he had always said his righteousness was above the law. Now, at last, Judas saw that all righteousness is not of the law. For the law leads to judgment, while the righteousness of love leads to forgiveness. Judas, who was without love or charity, had passed judgment not only upon the words and deeds of the Master, but also upon what was written in the Torah, the word of God. Now for the first time did he understand that no man can judge God's ways. But now it was too late. The Master was dying on the cross. Judas sobbed, but it brought him no relief. He buried his head in his arms, and overcome with grief he lay still on the couch.

When Judas came to himself again, he looked around. No light came in through the curtain. He started up. How long had he lain there? The horrible image of the Master on a cross assailed him. He ran out of the house.

It was dark outside. A great black cloud was rapidly spreading over the sky. Driven by an irresistible urge, Judas hurried in the direction of Golgotha. In the darkness that now enshrouded the whole of Jerusalem, groups of people loomed up, coming from the hill. They seemed to be stricken with fear, and the sound of wailing was in the air.

Judas hurried on in the scorching heat. Once more he must see the Master's eyes rest on him, even if it was only in reproach for what he had done. A penitent, he was now going to suffer the burning torment of his guilt. No punishment, no suffering was great enough for him.

Suddenly a radiant light fell on Golgotha. Then, high above the heads of the people, Judas saw the three crosses. He pressed his hands to his breast. The pain there was suffocating him. Oblivious of all around him, he walked to the middle cross. He raised his head. Fighting his tears he sought the Master's gaze. But the Masters eyes were closed, and his head had dropped on his breast. The Master had departed forever.

Judas stood staring at the Master's lifeless body. Never again would His eyes rest on him, never again would the Master's light shine in his soul. Now he was alone with his guilt. The king was gone, the kingdom was lost. No miracle had happened. Now no one would build the white temple on earth. It was the end of all things.

Judas left Golgotha, pushing his way through the crowd still staring at the middle cross. There could never be hope again. Useless had the mighty made the Master's glorious life, unavailing his holy struggle. His humiliation before the Sanhedrin had no sense, neither had his horrible death on the cross. Neither earthly nor heavenly powers had come to liberate him. Now only a dark domain remained, ruling all souls.

Turning his thoughts to the priests who had tricked him, the pain within him subsided and a violent rage took hold of Judas. They had led him on with deceit and treachery and bound him with their blood money. There was no righteousness in the leaders of the people.

The mighty of the temple had destroyed the kingdom of light. But he, Judas, knew what he had to do. This was his hour. The voice of the Master had been silenced on the cross but the voice of justice could still speak.

Judas recalled how Caiaphas handled the coins, and a fierce hatred rose in his breast. He had been cheated and humiliated but he was alive, and there was one thing he could still do. He could obtain justice. He would throw his crushing burden on their shoulders and let them collapse beneath it. He was like a warrior who, though mortally wounded, strikes with his last force to destroy the enemy.

Judas hurried through the intense heat and the unnatural darkness. Clouds of grey dust partially obscured the shapes of horses and camels and people who seemed to be scattering in all directions. He alone went straight to his goal, even without the Master's light.

Suddenly Judas felt uncertainly for the silver coins that pressed on his chest, the chain cunningly forged by Caiaphas. He jerked the purse away from his heart and held it clasped in his hand. He walked on. Simpleton, he had believed in the righteousness of the mighty. Now he saw through them all. No longer did he go to them in humility—he went to condemn. And there was one who went with him and whose support he felt. But he did not ask if it were an angel of God.

There was a strange glow in Judas. He was bringing the blood money back. Already he saw the silver coins in Caiaphas' hands, sticky with blood. Within him, like a feeble echo, sounded the voice of John the Baptist, "Repent and forgive." But Judas shut the warning voice out. His head might fall, like that of John; he might die on the cross, like his Master, but only after the hour of justice.

At last he reached the hall of the Romans. He knew that Caiaphas would come there. The mighty among the Jews could be trusted to seek protection from their own people under the Roman eagle, which at other times was considered an idol. They sat banded together in the peristyle. Caiaphas was not among them yet.

Judas stood near the entrance. He could wait now for hours, for days. Rabbis, members of the Sanhedrin, and scribes sat on benches. A group of men stood close together as if they were afraid. Judas saw the diminutive figure of Ben Samuel, the sly lawyer, and Moses, the arrogant head of the temple guard. None of them showed their usual haughty demeanor. Grimly Judas listened to their talk.

"I've never seen such darkness in the middle of the day," said one.

"Everything has gone wrong," said another. "Was it not written that the sun would be darkened and the moon become red as blood?"

"There are powers on earth and in heaven one should stand in awe of," an old man quavered. "We should not have killed him."

Ben Samuel, hearing these words, approached the old man and said sharply, "What drivel do I hear? We Jews did not kill him. The Procurator sentenced him and the soldiers nailed him to the cross. Not we. We are innocent."

The blood rushed to Judas' head as he heard these words. He stood towering above the small lawyer. "Your words are lies, Ben Samuel, you master of injustice."

Ben Samuel drew back in fear, calling, "Moses, Moses, where are you?"

The head of the police approached slowly and said, "What does Judas Iscariot want of us? He has served us faithfully." Showing the palms of his hands in a half-convincing, half-questioning gesture, he said, "Has he not been richly rewarded with thirty silver coins?" But as he saw Judas' angry eyes he cautiously took a step backward and said lamely, "What does he want here? Let him go his own way."

There he stood now, Judas thought, that vile spy who always came sneaking after the Master and never dared approach him in public. Moses saw such a fierce hatred in Judas' eyes that he fell back another step. At that moment Judas saw the big Pharisee who so often had spoken rudely to the Master. He grinned, "Ha, Iscariot, the red one. Poor, broken tool. Kick him away, Moses. He's been paid for, now away with him!"

Judas took two steps toward the Pharisee. Moses, anxiously stepping aside, staggered and nearly fell down. Now Judas would kill. But the Pharisee turned and ran so suddenly that Judas stopped. A dead silence prevailed. Judas had recovered his calm. All eyes were fixed fearfully upon him. Walking up to the priests, who hastily rose from their benches, he said, "I have come to bring back the thirty silver coins from your holy temple treasure, the blood money earned by you all, in order that Jeremiah's word should be fulfilled."

"The word of Jeremiah," the old man wailed, raising his hands to heaven. "Satan speaks, Satan himself is speaking."

A wild tumult started. Curses, cries and threats were hurled at Judas. But no one dared lift a finger. Ben Samuel dragged Moses along to use him as a cover, but Moses quickly disengaged himself. "Iscariot," Ben Samuel cried, his voice shrill with fear and anger, "dare you tell us that you are without guilt?"

Then Judas said in a voice that could be heard throughout the portico, "I have sinned in that I have betrayed innocent blood."

"What is that to us? Extortioner! Traitor!"

"Be silent!" Judas shouted, "I wanted to save him. I was blind. I was not wary of you who had resolved to put my holy Master to death."

They all shouted at the same time. Ben Samuel signalled for silence and cried, "You are lying again, Iscariot. We Jews never put a man to death. But we respect the right of the Romans to nail criminals to the cross. Our sentence was a just one."

"Just? With false witnesses?" Judas retorted.

"What is happening here?" a haughty voice cut in. It was Caiaphas. Judas spun around. This voice had hit him like a lash. His face turned ashen.

"I bring the thirty silver coins back," Judas said. "I bring the price of blood fixed by you. Accept them as your reward."

"How dare you speak like this to me? Elohim will punish you."

A flash of lightning flared and a thunderclap sounded. The hall trembled.

Judas, unmoved, looked down at Caiaphas, who instinctively had stooped. "Elohim speaks and you writhe with fear and guilt," he said scornfully.

"He is Satan himself," one rabbi cried.

"Take your thirty silver coins." A rumbling of thunder accompanied Judas' words.

"This comedy must stop," Caiaphas said. "Moses, call your men."

Unperturbed Judas said in a loud voice, "I bring you the price of him who was valued by the children of Israel, as the Scriptures say, fulfilling the word of Jeremiah, the prophet. Here, Caiaphas, is the silver with the symbols of the truth, the truth that you must give to strangers. The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you."

Caiaphas turned pale. Judas was as cold as if he were dead, but he felt driven on by an immense, inescapable power. There was a strange singing in his ears, as when he had drunk Caiaphas' spiced wine. Slowly, step by step, as one who moves in a dream, unconscious of everything about him but Caiaphas, he walked up to the high priest, the coins, the unbreakable chain of thirty links in his hand.

Caiaphas' fingers fumbled at his throat. "I refuse the coins," he gasped, "I refuse them."

"It is too late. There, pick them up." Judas threw the silver pieces at Caiaphas' feet. They fell jingling to the floor, bouncing up and then rolling away. Rabbis, lawyers, and scribes tried to stop them by putting their feet on them. Only Caiaphas stood motionless.

"A glorious night!" cried Judas. "Learned, holy men creeping like snakes in the dirt. They are all there, three times ten. Not one coin is missing.' Pointing to the men picking up the coins, Judas said, "Behold your people's future. You have stirred them up to crucify. You have driven them into the wilderness again. Their path will go along hills like Golgotha. And nowhere will they find peace. 'Crucify him, crucify him!' It will ring in their ears to eternity."

Caiaphas retorted, "Our people will live in power and abundance. That is God's will."

"You have put my holy Master on the cross. You have all cried aloud, 'His blood be on us and our children.' And so it shall be."

Judas turned and left. All eyes followed him.

"Everything is happening as this Iscariot said," an old man wailed. "He did not take the bloodmoney. He has cursed us with our own words. And the Nazarene's blood will be on our children."

A Roman centurion and a decurion came out to the peristyle to see what all the uproar was about. "They are wailing about some silver coins," the decurion said.

"They are as blind as owls in the light of day," the centurion said disdainfully, "but they can see gold and precious stones hidden in the heart of the earth and the smallest copper coin in the mud of the deepest ditch."

"Sir," one of the priests said humbly to the centurion, "you will protect us if the crowd grows restless, won't you?"

"We will protect you as long as you honor Caesar and bow down before the Roman eagle, for their power is eternal."

Again the storm lashed out. A violent gust of wind blew through the portico, there was a flash of lightning, a thunderclap. Cries sounded in the sudden darkness. Outside the Roman eagle fell down. Someone shouted that the might of Rome was finished. In another flash of lightning they saw the centurion lift the standard and set it upright again. The golden bird was besmeared with mud, the open beak filled with dirt.

It turned into a dark night. The priests discussed the money they now considered defiled. According to the law they could not put it back into the treasury. So they counted out three times ten silver coins, and after having taken counsel they bought with these a potter's field to bury strangers in. And for the time being they forgot Judas Iscariot's curse.

Judas hurried away from the hall of the Romans. Justice had been done. He had crushed those who had used him as a tool for their infernal schemes. Yet he felt no satisfaction, no alleviation of the terrible burden that oppressed him. He soon slackened his pace. Wandering in a daze he mingled with people he scarcely saw, passing animals, houses, and alleyways he hardly recognized were there.

Suddenly he felt himself gripped by the chest, and above him he saw Romelo's face twisted with grief and rage.

"Judas, you traitor! You were at the head of the Romans and the priests!" the giant shouted angrily, threatening him with his huge clenched fist.

Once before Romelo had gripped him like that, but then it was in a playful way. Seeing the fury in Romelo's eyes, Judas almost wished he would strike out and kill him on the spot. It would put an end to his unbearable suffering.

"Speak up! What have you to say for yourself?" The former gladiator, beside himself with rage, shook Judas violently.

"Romelo, what are you doing? Let me talk to Judas." It was Mary's voice.

Romelo lowered his fist, Judas felt the iron grip relax a little. Then, reluctantly, Romelo let go of him.

Mary looked sadly at Judas. Her face was streaked with tears, her robe was dusty. Her radiant beauty had been clouded over by the tragedy. Judas saw she was but the shadow of her former self, she who once was the queen of them all, and whom he had loved with a blind passion. How could he ever have been so rash as to desire such a woman? To be near her should have been enough. He wondered whether her loyalty and devotion to the teachings of the Master would keep her from sinking into despair. No, her life was finished also. And he himself had brought this about. He felt he must confess this to her. His head lowered, he said, "I, in my conceit, tried to force our Master to make peace with the mighty who sought to destroy him. I am guilty. No punishment is great enough for me."

Mary looked at him in silence. Then she said in a low voice, "Before he died, our Master said something which concerns you, Judas. His words were, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do'."

Judas looked up. Suddenly there were tears in his eyes. He had not known what he was doing. Was there some hope after all?

"This is what the Master has always taught, Judas. Mercy and forgiveness await all who repent and come to him in faith and trust. He even promised one of the thieves who died with him. . . ." She paused to regain her self-control. "He promised the thief that today he would be with him in Paradise."

Judas cast down his eyes. "Forgive them," the Master had said. But he, Judas, had condemned, he had thought only of revenge, and he even had cursed Caiaphas and his followers for eternity. Looking up he shook his head. "My sins are too great."

"No sin is too great," Mary said. "If you have repented, you are no longer under the law of God but under his love."

This sounded like the words the Master had spoken—so long ago, it seemed now. But it was too easy, Judas thought, his crime was too great. "There can be no forgiveness for me who did not forgive others," he said.

"You cannot judge for yourself, whether you deserve forgiveness, Judas," Romelo said. His look of anger had subsided. "Once you saved me from the bloody arena. Now we will help you, Judas, come with us." And putting his hand on Judas' arm in an almost affectionate gesture, he added, "I forgot myself. Forgive me."

"Romelo is right. Come with us, Judas," Mary pleaded. "We are going to the house of a friend. There is also a place for you."

For one moment Judas felt the temptation to reach out and take this love so freely offered. But after that what was he to do? How could he start life all over again as if this terrible day had never been? No, for him there was no return from the abyss of his guilt.

He looked them both full in the face. "Nobody can help me. For the Master also said, 'Woe to the man by whom the Son of man is betrayed'."

A look of sharp pain crossed Mary's face. "Judas, you don't understand. The love he offers can blot out every sin, if you repent."

"There are many things I have never understood," Judas said bitterly. He now felt more like himself. "I was the last of the disciples in every way!"

"But what are you going to do?" Mary asked in an anxious voice.

Put to him so directly, Judas found this question intolerable. He could not tell her that there was only one thing left he could do. Avoiding the imploring look in Mary's eyes, he took a step back from her. "I must go on now," he said.

"Judas, think again. Come with us. The forgiveness of our Master is for you, too." There was an urgent plea in Mary's voice.

Judas could not stand it any longer. With one last anguished look at her, he turned and ran.

Down one crooked road, and up another, eventually Judas' path led him to a gateway that opened to the country outside the city. He went through it. The unnatural darkness that had come over Jerusalem had given way to night. He didn't know where he was going but he hurried on.

The countenance of the Master rose before his eyes. Again he heard the words, "Woe to him by whom the Son of man is betrayed." He had indeed betrayed him, not only many times but in the most holy things. Even while listening to his voice, Judas had denied his holy word of truth and love. Again and again he had wandered stubbornly in darkness.

He felt a great weariness coming over him. Thoughts, images, visions of the past whirled through his head. Cyborea, his sweet mother, looked at him anxiously. Again he was a boy, secure near her. He wondered why her dark eyes were full of fear.

Should he go back home? In Kerioth he had always been the "red-haired Amorite." Memories of his childhood flooded through Judas' aching brain. He could hear again the consolation of Arisio when the other boys taunted him for his red hair. "Your will was always strong, Judas, stronger than the others." He had never really been one of them. There had always been a shadow over him, a wall that separated him from his own kind.

He saw Simon, his father, beckoning, calling, "Come home, Judas, come home." Surely the lost son went home to find what he could not find in the pigsty. And his father forgave him and gave him the best robe and a ring for his hand, and they ate of the fatted calf and were merry. The Master had said so. But Judas knew he would never eat of the fatted calf and be merry. For the king was crucified and the kingdom lost. He would be the lost son forever.

He stumbled on. A dead olive tree pointed its bare branches at him in accusation. Exhausted, he sank down at last on a stone, holding his tired head in his hands.

He heard the voices of Aram and Jacob, the shepherds. He had come over a high ridge to the end of the road—no going forward, no retreating, the abyss beneath him. "There is no road," they called to him. Rabbi Emmanuel had said there were many roads and many gates leading to the holy light. But Judas' roads had only led to gates that were closed and he had wandered in darkness. Now the Master's light was gone forever. With the light the shadow died, and he, Judas, was the shadow.

Mary's voice came back to him with her plea to let himself be forgiven. She had not lost hope for the kingdom. How could she still hope when the king was dead? Yet she had not despaired. She had been full of grief but she had not given up. How could she be so sure that all the Master's teachings still had meaning even though the kingdom was now impossible? In his heart Judas knew that Mary also would learn to despair. The day would come when she would see that the cause was lost. And on that day she would wonder how she could ever have forgiven Judas Iscariot.

Then a voice cut across his thoughts. It was the voice that he had never tried to silence, the voice of his own will.

"Iscariot, it was I who made you proud, who set you apart from other men. When you clenched your fist in indignation, it was I who did it. I made you feel superior, fit to pass judgment on others. And it was I who sowed the seed of blind passion in you. It grew luxuriantly, like a weed. I alone have been your guide and teacher, and you have been my splendid pupil—wilful and stern. And you have been ever faithful to me."

Judas pulled himself to his feet as an unearthly laughter seemed to echo among the rocks. He looked around. The moon had risen in a lonely sky and cast a strange light on the barren, stony land about him. The olive tree made fantastic tortured shadows.

Judas felt as desolate and barren as the land. In his loneliness he remembered how the eyes of the Master had looked into his soul with perfect knowledge. The Master himself had washed the feet of Judas Iscariot. The Master knew his blindness and sins, and yet he had washed his feet. Again he heard the voice of perfect love.

"Master," Judas spoke aloud in his agony, "Master, I have sinned against the most holy things, against the love and the truth you taught me. Judge me, O Lord, the most guilty of all."

His only answer was a vision of the Master's eyes looking at him with compassion for one moment, then the eyes closed, and the horrible image of his pale face under the crown of thorns assailed him. From all sides, as if a hundred voices were shouting at him, he heard, "Woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed." The words rang out over the moonlit rocks. "It would be better for that man if he had never been born."

Judas put his hands to his ears to shut out the noise. There must be an end to this torment.

The face of Caiaphas rose before him, holding out a chain of silver coins to Judas. The chain of hatred! Judas put his hand to his throat. He couldn't breathe. The links of the chain fitted his neck like a collar, tighter and tighter. Then the pieces of silver seemed to glitter before him as he staggered to the olive tree near the abyss.

His hand touched the bark of the tree, and all at once the voices were silent, the night grew still again. He looked around at the moonlight on the rocks. For the first time in many days his head was perfectly clear.

The Master was dead. As he had judged others, as he had judged the priests of the temple, Judas must now judge himself.

Removing the rope that bound his robe at the waist, Judas attached one end firmly to the branch that reached far out over the abyss. The other end he tied around his neck, then jumped.

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